



# UNFINISHED JOURNEY

*By The Same Author*

RHONDDA ROUNDABOUT. (*Faber & Faber*)

BLACK PARADE. (*Faber & Faber*)

BIDDEN TO THE FEAST. (*Hamish Hamilton*)

Jack Jones  
UNFINISHED JOURNEY



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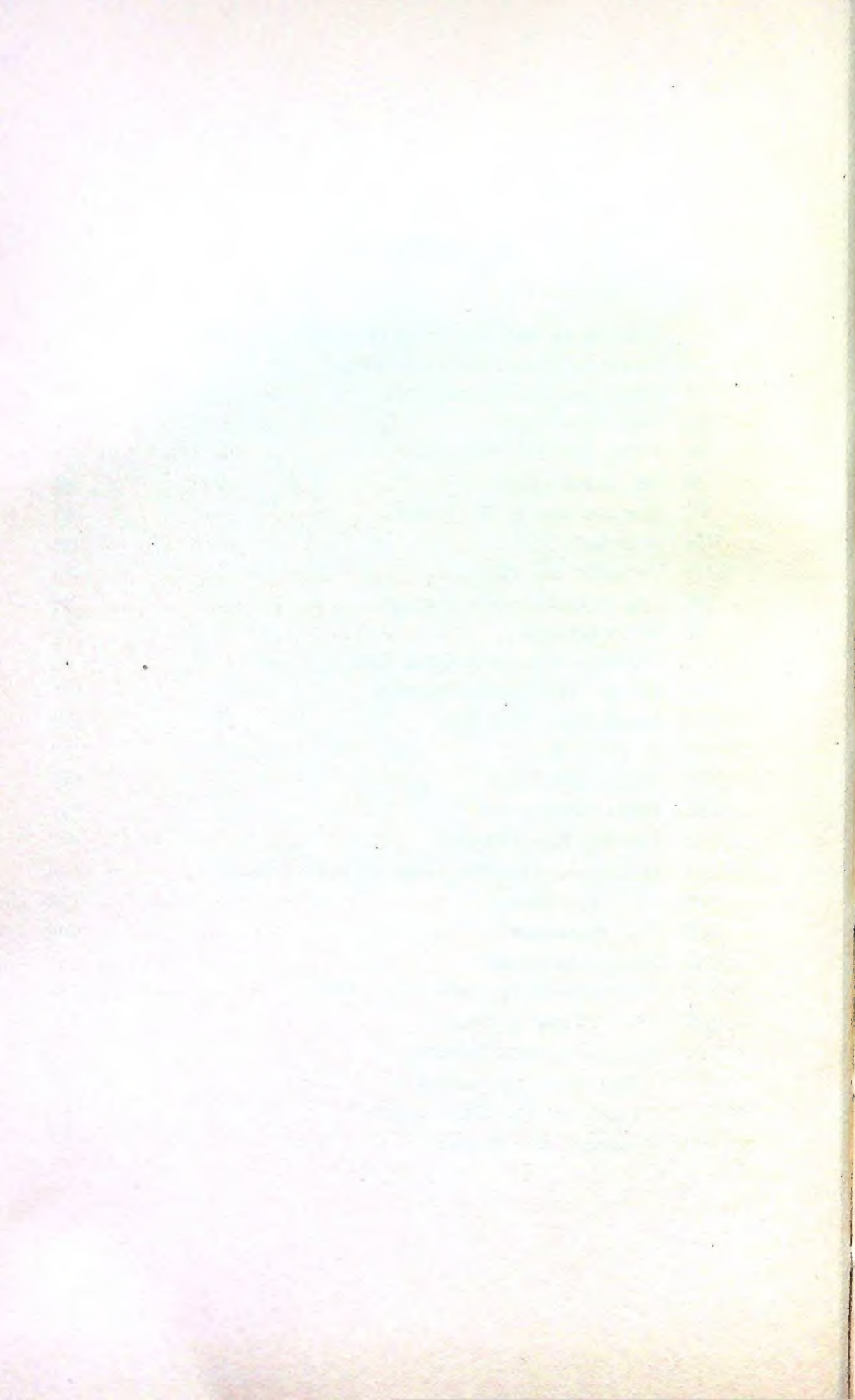
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MADE 1938 IN GREAT BRITAIN

PRINTED BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD., FROME & LONDON  
FOR READERS' UNION LTD. REGISTERED OFFICES: 66  
CHANDOS STREET, BY CHARING CROSS, LONDON, ENGLAND

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE BY THE RT. HON. D. LLOYD GEORGE . . .	7
I	NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 24TH, 1884. . . . .	9
II	AND THEY CALLED HIM JOHN . . . . .	16
III	THE TWO JOHNS . . . . .	24
IV	"THE REG'LAR VILLAIN" . . . . .	30
V	TO SCHOOL LATE . . . . .	38
VI	HURRAH FOR D. A. THOMAS . . . . .	46
VII	BUTCHER'S BOY . . . . .	53
VIII	TO MEET THE PRINCE . . . . .	63
IX	OH, THAT DIAMOND JUBILEE . . . . .	73
X	NIGHT-SCHOOL . . . . .	87
XI	"THERE GOES MY SOLDIER BOY" . . . . .	95
XII	PRISON—PROMOTION—PUGILISM . . . . .	111
XIII	BRAVE NEW BOROUGH . . . . .	120
XIV	IS THIS HE . . . ? . . . . .	130
XV	THERE AND BACK . . . . .	140
XVI	POSTAL INTERLUDE . . . . .	154
XVII	ON THE HOME FRONT. . . . .	167
XVIII	MEDALS—A MENTION—AND A LITTLE MONEY . . .	182
XIX	"UP THE REDS!" . . . . .	192
XX	THE RENEGADE . . . . .	204
XXI	MINERS LET DOWN . . . . .	217
XXII	"WHAT ARE YOU NOW THEN, JOHN?" . . . . .	230
XXIII	MY "MAGNUM OPUS" . . . . .	244
XXIV	ANGLO-SCOTTISH JOURNEYS . . . . .	260
XXV	A-NAVVYING WE WILL GO . . . . .	276
XXVI	"DAD'S ON THE DOLE AGAIN" . . . . .	289
XXVII	GRANNY AND GRANSER . . . . .	302





## PREFACE

THIS is a challenging book. It is completely and disarmingly frank ; obviously truthful ; telling its story in the simplest and homeliest of language, without conscious art or artifice. Free from pose or hypocrisy, the author neither preens himself before the mirror of memory with any effort to exaggerate his merits, nor seeks to excuse or conceal his blunders, faults and simplicities. "That's the sort of man I am," he says, as he describes himself with effortless and untroubled candour.

He gives the facts ; gives them with a photographic vividness of description that is akin to genius. He brings you with him into the slums of Merthyr Tydfil, down to the cramped workings of the coal mines, to chapel and theatre, to barracks and battlefield, to conclaves of hot Communists, and the fizzling futility of Sir Oswald Mosley's abortive New Party. With your own eyes and ears you can see and hear these people moving and talking as if in real life.

It is a remarkable story he has to tell. His is a restless, Celtic temperament, imaginative, gifted, capable of terrific exertion, but without the prosaic ballast which anchors in a steady harbourage. Born in the vermin-ridden hovel of a Welsh miner, working at the pit-face from the day he reached twelve years of age, Jack Jones was destined to travel many strange workings and put his hand to a curious variety of jobs, before in the end he fought his way into literature. He has been miner, forester, navvy, soldier, communist agitator, trade union official, political propagandist, book salesman, cinema manager, lecturer, free-lance journalist, playwright and author. He has mixed with well-known figures in the political and the



literary world. He has lived with his family for long spells on the dole, after satisfying the inquisitions of the means-test investigator. Success and failure he has known : the kicks have in his career been more plentiful than the ha'pence.

I came personally into contact with Jack Jones some ten years ago, after he had been driven out of the Labour Party for voicing his disgust with their mishandling of the mining situation, and advocating by speech and pen a more enlightened policy. I was attracted alike by his ability, his active mind, and his patent sincerity. For a time I used his services in the Liberal campaign, leading up to the 1929 election, and I still remember with gratitude the quality of his work.

I commend most heartily this book of his, in which he sets down his autobiography. For all its roughness, it has the effect of bringing the reader right into the living presence of those he describes. And thereby he has made vivid for us a tender, deeply understanding picture of the home life of simple, patient, incredibly diligent workers in the mining towns and villages of South Wales, and the regal heroism of their wives and mothers. No one can rise from reading this book without a kindlier understanding for the lives of these humble people of the Welsh valleys, and a profounder admiration for their silent heroism.

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

*March 4th, 1937.*



## CHAPTER I

NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 24TH, 1884

“AN awful night,” the old puddler said it was. It blew and it rained as he sat near the fire in the living-room of the bug-ridden hovel in which, two years previous to this November night, his youngest daughter, Saran, had started her married life with David Jones. She had been the last to leave home. All gone now. Harry and Marged, in homes of their own. Grandchildren coming. But Ike and John . . .

He chuckled as he recalled how the old woman, his wife, had dished Harry that morning he was about to sling his hook to America. But the old woman, concerned about Ann and her baby, instead of calling Harry, called Ike, and packed him off to America with Harry's papers and carpet bag full of clothes and things. How Harry had roared when he got out of bed about middle-day to find that his brother Ike had gone off with his ticket and carpet bag. But the old woman managed to smooth him over, and persuaded him to marry Ann—who was a tidy gel. Ike, of course, could go off to America, for he had no gel in trouble. He hadn't been back home from the Zulu War six weeks when the old woman sent him off so early in the morning instead of Harry. And not a word from him or about him had they heard since he had left.

Where is he out there? True, he can't write any more than the others, but surely he could get somebody to write a word for him. Ah, well, that's the way they are. That John again . . . Tramping the country. Never a word—no, nor a penny of help, either. His sons-in-law were better to him than his own boys. Still, it would be nice to hear from 'em once in a while; the old woman was worrying about 'em. Always running to ask people who received letters from relatives in America if there was anything in the letter about her boy Ike. She seemed to think that everybody in America must know her boy Ike; but he had told her that America was a big place. No good her telling people to write to their

relations to ask if they had met a young man who had arrived in America shortly after he had finished fighting the Zulus with the good old 24th.

Anyway, she was in her oil now. He could hear her clucking and moving about upstairs. She was never happier than when helping her grandchildren into the world. No sooner had she heard that her youngest, Saran, was about to take to her bed, than off she went, leaving him alone in the house. So he had locked the door, put the key under the stone, and followed her down to Saran's. Not that *he* could do anything, but it was better him sit in Saran's by the fire, where he could hear 'em talking, than sit in the house up the back by hisself. He could keep the fire going, anyway. Yes, he could do that.

Time that midwife was here. Saran had lost her first before she had her long. A lovely little gel it was, and they had named her Raddy after somebody. She died, and with her many more babies that had been born to die in homes too near the stinking Morlais and Taff. That last very dry summer had brought the fever which had took many a baby, ay, and old people like hisself, from the houses along the side of the Morlais Brook and the River Taff, to the new cemetery up in Cefn, where they were laid to rest far enough from the stink of the town. Lovely up there in the Cefn, where they buried people, but down in the town the old fever kept coming and coming—

"Blowing again," he muttered, as the glare of the furnaces reddened the window. In Dowlais Works now. Steel—Bessemer. Yes, that was what had finished him and many a-more old iron puddlers. Not wanted now. The year previous the world-famous Cyfarthfa Works where he had worked for the Crawshay who was the greatest of the Iron Kings, had gone on from iron to steel, and he—ay, and many thousands like him—had been scrapped with the old iron-making plant. After having toiled to make eight millions sterling for the great Iron King they had been scrapped and left to die as paupers.

His thoughts were bitter as he sat noting the new furnaces of Dowlais and Cyfarthfa illuminating the district and the sky above. He had worked for them all, all the English iron-masters who had made their millions in Merthyr and Dowlais. Sir Josiah John Guest, yes, he had worked for him before ever he was "Sir" or M.P. Just plain Josiah John; ay, and for his lady, Charlotte, who had kept the Dowlais colliers out for two months. Unconditional surrender was what she had demanded. As bad as old Crawshay himself, she was. Now



they were gone, gone to live in their parks at Caversham and Wimbourne, leaving their old puddlers with constitutions ruined by too much hard work, drinking, and insanitary home life, to fill workhouses and fatten graveyards.

There's Dowlais blowing again. Iron rails had died hard at that greatest of the world's ironworks—yes, had died harder than the scrapped iron puddlers were dying. Not until that very day had they started rolling steel rails at Dowlais. Ah, he thought, if the great Guest, the great Crawshay, and old Sam Homfray were alive, they would not have allowed the puddlers who had worked so hard for them to want a day's work in their old age. For they——

The door opened, and the wind rushed in to blow the flame of the oil-lamp which was on the table out through the glass globe.

"Oh, what a night," gasped the midwife.

"Shut the door," cried the old man. "Shut it quick before the wind blows us away. I can't light the lamp again until you shut the door."

"Neither can I shut the door until this umbrella of mine is right side out again," said the old midwife. "What a night to pick to bring babies into the world—— That's got it." She closed the door.

"Now let's see if we can light this lamp—— Oh, the globe's hot."

"What are you sitting in the dark for?" said Saran's mother as coming downstairs.

"I'm not sitting," said the midwife.

"The wind blew the lamp out," said the old man, lighting it. "There you are."

"Now we can see what we're doing," said the midwife, hanging her umbrella, cloak and bonnet to drip from a hook fastened to the door. "How is she up there?"

"Pretty good—I don't think it'll be long now."

"Time for me to drink a cup of tea by here by the fire, do you think?"

"Yes, plenty—I'll pour it for you. Sit down."

"I will for a minute. Me an' my umbrella was very near blown over the iron railing of the bridge down into the Morlais. If it rises much higher, you people in these houses will be like Noah an' his family——"

"We haven't got any milk, for Saran had to take to her bed before——"

"I never take milk in my tea, nor water in my drop of



short, thank you. Oh, a cup of tea is nice. Listen to Morlais Brook roaring like if it was the River Taff. Still, I'd rather it be like that than the way it is in the dry summers, when it stinks enough to knock you down. Ay, an' that stink's took more babies to their graves up the Cefn than ever I'll bring to replace 'em. Why in the name of God don't they make place for people to live up on the breast, where there's plenty of room? No, leave 'em down here in the hole, 'the cinder hole', as I once heard Lady Charlotte Guest herself call it. Your gel's husband not home from his work yet?"

"Not yet."

"Must be working a doubler. Ah, that cup o' tea warmed me—though it's a drop of short a body wants on such a night. Let's go up an' see how she's getting on with the job."

"I'll be up after you as soon as I've taken Dai's taters an' meat out of the oven in case he comes whilst we're upstairs."

"Stay you down to tend to him; Saran an' me'll manage."

"No doubt you will," muttered Saran's mother as the midwife went upstairs. "But Saran's my daughter—— Did you hear what she said about her drop of short?" she said in a whisper to the old man.

"Ay, I heard."

"So did I. But I'm not going through this rain across to the Nelson for a drop of short for her. Here's Dai's taters an' meat drying up—leave it out on the hob with a plate over it. Keep the fire as high as you can, for he'll be wet to the skin, I expect. He's later than he's ever been."

"P'raps he's turned in somewhere for a pint on strap."

"Ay, an' p'raps two—— Don't let this big saucepan of water boil away, for we'll be wanting hot water."

She climbed the ladder-like stairway as the old man attended to the fire. Quarter of an hour later she came down again. "Dai not come?"

"Not yet."

"I want that little tin bath down from our house, so take that umbrella of hers from behind the door—don't be long now."

Out into the night he went, soon to return with the little tin bath, and to find his son-in-law, David Jones, taking off his wet pit-clothes. "So you've come at last."

"Ay, an' wet to the skin," said the old woman, taking the little tin bath he had fetched. She half-filled it with hot water. "There's plenty left for you to wash yourself all over, Dai. I must go back upstairs to Saran." Upstairs she went.

"My feet are wet too," said the old man.

"Then take your boots an' stockings off," said his son-in-law.

"I will after I've been down to the tap to get plenty of water for you to wash, and for them upstairs."

"Pass me the tub in as you're going."

The old man, whilst Dai shielded the lamp from the wind, passed the bath-tub, made out of half a beer barrel, in to him. Then he went on down to the tap which was fixed to the wall about the middle of the row. Having filled the two buckets he returned to the house.

Dai had washed his upper part, with the exception of his back.

"Quick, take your boots an' stockings off, an' put them old slaps of mine on whilst they dry before the fire. Sit there in the armchair. What time did Saran take to her bed?"

The old man looked up with one of his sopping wet elastic-sided boots in his hand. "Let's see—it was after dark, I know. Somewhere between six an' seven it was when the boy from next door came up to tell her mother to come down."

"H'm. Then she didn't ought to be long now." Quite naked now as he stepped into the tub to wash his legs.

"Do you want me to wash your back for you, Dai?"

"No, leave it to-night— Don't stand there in your bare feet. Put those old slaps of mine on."

"I will as soon as I've hung these stockings of mine in front of the fire to dry. How was you so late to-night?"

"Had to stay to clear a top-hole so as to be able to start filling coal first thing to-morrow morning."

"Sixteen hours is a longish shift. From five in the morning till nine at night—tut, no sense in it."

"Sense or not it's got to be done to get anything like a wage. Reach me that towel."

"Funny, isn't it?"

"What is?"

"Us old puddlers can't get any work at all; an' you young colliers got to work the clock round nearly. Stand between the wind and that lamp till I empty this tub over the doorstep."

"Ay, an' let the tub go out with the water on to the bailey."

After he had emptied the water and closed the door, and fixed the piece of sacking along the bottom of the door, the old man returned to the armchair. He lit his pipe. Dai, with only his evening flannel shirt and drawers on, sat down to his taters an' meat as the old woman, Saran's mother, came down-

stairs for more hot water. "Not yet," she said in reply to the men's inquiring looks. Back upstairs she went, but not before she had said in a whisper: "She's still botherin' about her drop of short up there. Says she gets it everywhere she goes—but I'm taking no notice of her old bother."

"Tell her that she shall have the price of a two of rum to take on her way home," said Dai. "But if she brings me a boy, tell her she shall have the price of two-twos of rum."

"Indeed, I'll tell her no such thing," said Saran's mother, who didn't hold with women, let them be wives, widows or midwives, supping drink. Back upstairs she went.

"Our Harry told me to-day that they've started to roll steel rails up in Dowlais works," said the old man.

"Oh, ay," said Dai indifferently.

"Ay," sighed the old man, "an' it's domino on us old puddlers now that Dowlais has gone from iron to steel. Dai, if old Sam Homfray an' William Crawshay an' Josiah John Guest had lived, them works wouldn't be rolling the steel rails that's put all us puddlers on the road to the workhouse."

Dai said: "Wouldn't they? That's all you know. The bosses always makes what pays 'em best. If it paid 'em to they'd make rails out o' black-pudding—that's if rails could be made out of black-pudding. What the hell do they care? None of 'em b'longs here. They came, the damned lot of 'em, from God only knows where up England way. The Crawshays; the Guests; Bacon an' Homfray; Bruce an' Fothergill; an' the rest." He poured strong tea into the saucer to cool. "They came—an' now they're on the wing. They didn't come here for our good—nor to stay here after they'd done their eye-good. No fear. Now that they've turned the place shang-de-vang they're on the wing. We Welsh people couldn't turn it out fast enough for 'em, so they brought the English down, an' shipped the Irish across—ay, an' all nationalities till they've made Merthyr like what it was where they tried to build the Tower of Babel. Humph, an' you talk about what the old bosses would do if they was alive——"

"Dai, you listened too much to that man Halliday, who only came down here from England—yes, he came from England too, remember, to start unions and make strikes."

"John, if you wasn't my father-in-law I'd tell you something. Halliday? Humph, pity there wasn't more like him, then we'd have wages we could live on—ay, an' houses we could live in, not places like this where we're eaten alive by

bugs that we can't get rid of. Saran an' her mother have tried every damned thing they can think of, an' still—a fire is wanted to burn the damned town clean. You old puddlers—— With one breath you're talking about being driven to the work-house, and with the next you're sticking up for them who've driven you there. Ay, voting for 'em. Halliday would have been standing up for us in Parliament instead of one of these two we've got if the likes of you had had enough sense to see which was the best man."

"I shall always vote for Henry Richard, Dai, who is a Welshman—— I can't make you young chaps out. There's you, Ned Luke, an' that Harry of mine always talking against the bosses, and about 'em coming here from England to do their eye-good. Yet when this Halliday came here from England to make unions——"

"Yes, unions, not money, remember."

"All right, we'll leave it at that. All the same, you'll never see Halliday or any of them Labour men in Parliament for Merthyr. An' I'll say again what I've said before, if the old bosses was alive, we'd still be making iron rails same as we used to ; an' all the works would be in full swing ; an' us puddlers would all be working same as you colliers are. Ay, the furnaces would all be—— What are them women laughing about up there?"

"A boy, a boy," the old woman his wife was crying as she fell over herself coming down the almost perpendicular, ladder-like stairway. "No, no, I didn't hurt myself a bit," she assured the two men as they helped her to her feet. "Oh, Dai, Saran's got a lovely boy up there—— Go an' see. A lovely boy he is . . ."



## CHAPTER II

### AND THEY CALLED HIM JOHN

THEY named me after my grandfather, the old puddler, my mother's father. The brother who followed me into the world they called William ; and the brother who followed him they called Frank. It was this Frank who forced me, a rising three-year-old, off the breast. With a full set of teeth in my head I still cried for the breast on which William and Frank were feeding and thriving. "Shut up, and don't be a baby. You're a big boy now," our mam and her mother kept on telling me as they spoonfed me and handed me crusts to chew.

Big boy, was I ? Well, being as I had the name I'd have the game, and off I wandered alone to find out for myself the sort of world I was in. Then it was : "Where's that Johnny of ours—the little devil as he is—gone to now again ?" They would find me under coal-trucks playing with the coal, and trying to eat bits of it ; or down by the Morlais Brook smiling at the rats that chased each other into the water and back into their holes in the wall of the far right bank. Several times I fell into the brook. Always I fouled myself and my clothes with the human excrement with which the left bank, the bank on which we lived, was thickly overlaid.

Then, after I had been washed and changed and scolded by our mam and her mother, I would be taken by the latter up around the back to where she lived in a house even smaller than ours with the old man, my mother's father, who was learning to read now that he had no work to go to. Not English, but Welsh he was learning to read from a big Bible. Glasses on nose he worked aloud on word-breaking, and he was hoping some day to be such a good reader that his five illiterate children, of whom our mam was one, would be fired by his example to learn to read themselves.

"Here," the old woman used to shout as she pushed me forward against the Bible on the old man's knee, "why don't you keep an eye on this boy of our Saran's ? Killed under the

trucks he'll be, or drowned in the river—yes, you can laugh, you little devil, you."

Who could help laughing at our mam's mother when she spoke so fast in Welsh. The old man, with the Bible on his lap, would look down at me through his glasses. "Drowned?" he would murmur.

"Certainly, unless you look after him better."

"Oh, then I must look after them all. Saran's, and Harry's, and Marged's——"

"Nobody's asking you to look after Harry's children and Marged's, for they're not living where you can keep an eye on 'em same as you can on Saran's. She's got as much as she can do with them other two babies an' another one coming without fishing this one out of the river every whipstitch. Come on, move yourself, an' take the boy with you down the road for a bit of a walk."

I pulled him by the hand until he smiled, for they had called me John after him. In less than a minute we would be crossing the bridge in front of our house to get out on to the main street of the town, to me the street of many wonders. But before he and I started knocking about town together, I had, in my childish way, made myself familiar with the neighbourhood in which our house was situated in a row of houses called Tai-Harry-Blawd, which in the English tongue is rendered as Harry Blawd's Houses. This row, "our row", as I called it, was a row of about twelve double-houses built on the left bank of Morlais Brook, into which our dad, had he wanted to, could have, from our doorstep, jumped in three jumps. We lived in the third of the twelve backless hovels called the bottom houses, or the front row, the houses at each end of which were what one might call the bridge houses, being nearest the two bridges over which one crossed the brook to get to the main street.

Then there was the top, or the back row of houses, the third storey of our bottom row. To get to them we had to round the end of the row and go through a narrow bottle-necked gully. The passage-way between the door of the top-houses and the bank of rock was about a yard wide. Our mam's parents lived "around the back", so I knew the back as well as I knew the front. It was a sort of "back becomes front" building scheme—that's if such places can be called a "scheme". In the bottom row we could look out on to the main street from the doorstep; people living above us in the top row looked out on to the main street through their back windows.

The twelve families living in the twelve houses of the bottom row shared two privies, two little caves of ease let into the wall at each end of the row. These two little caves of concentrated stink the children of the row rarely used, rarely had the chance to use, for when we did go there it was usually to find one of the men of the row enjoying a smoke as he eased himself leisurely. Still, there was always the left bank of the brook, more often than not referred to as the river, this being the recognized place of easement for juveniles ; and also for adults under cover of darkness, and when the two holes in the wall were occupied. The top row also had two privies for communal use ; but there was only one water-tap, and that was fixed to the wall at half-way point in the bottom row. On the recognized washing-days the supply was often less than the demand, and women would for long, and throughout the day, be seen with buckets and pans waiting their turn to go to the tap which, after being heavily taxed in the earlier part of the day, would only yield a trickle which would only fill one bucket per half-hour. Losing patience, the women would go down to the brook when there was enough water to cover the many dead cats and dogs, and fill their buckets there. They had plenty of coal to boil the poison out of it, they said.

For the families of both top and bottom rows there was one ashpit. It was an iron receptacle which when full to overflowing held about a cart-load of refuse, say half a ton. This was supposed to be cleared twice a week, but wasn't always. No sooner was it emptied than it was full again. Then the families carried their refuse to the two bridges and emptied it down into the brook to wait for the heavy rains to flood the brook and rush our refuse along to the River Taff and along to the sea.

The two bridges which flanked our row were not quite the same. The lower one carried a colliery railway, single line, along which the colliery company sent trucks of house-coal for distribution to its workmen at privileged rates. About five trucks at a time, say forty tons, were sent up to be unloaded at the colliery railway terminus that was within a few yards of the main street. The top bridge, the bridge in line with the door of our house and within a few yards of it, was for pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic only. Over this bridge something quite as wonderful as the railway engine and trucks using the lower bridge daily travelled. It was the four-in-hand Merthyr-Dowlais bus, the coach-house and stables for which



were sixty yards to the right of our house. From there two double-decker buses, each drawn by four spirited horses, issued each morning. Throughout the day spare teams of fresh horses crossed the bridge to be like lightning put into the harness the blown and perspiring horses stepped out of to go to the stables for a rest. Every other journey they changed, so it was like an all-day circus for us Tai-Harry-Blawd children. Why, to see old Bob Harris up aloft in the driver's seat, handling reins and long whip like the artist he was, was far more satisfying to me than were the engine and trucks using the lower bridge.

It was horses we boys of Tai-Harry-Blawd admired most. After the spirited bus-horses, the heavy cart-horses harnessed to the coal-carts. When the coal-carts were being loaded in certain winds the coal-dust would be blown across to settle on the clothes the women of the row had that day washed. All heavy things, owing to there being no proper drying-ground, used to be hung to drip and dry over the two bridges. Heavy patchwork quilts, and sometimes a blanket, would be seen hanging from the railing of the bridges. Only the women who continued the fight against the bugs troubled to wash heavy things, the others said it was no good trying. They used beds and bedding for as long as they could before throwing the lot into the brook and buying new. The floods were welcomed to rush these beds and bedding down the brook through three culverts under the streets to the Taff River, and from there along to the hospitable and sanitary ocean. Our mam, having no money to buy food some weeks, let alone new bedding, had to go on fighting the bugs as best she could. She and her mother tried all sorts of things from time to time, but without success, for the bugs used to retreat into the walls, the ceiling, everywhere. Still, the bugs didn't worry me much after I had got used to them.

The strip of ground between the row and the brook was the playground for the children of the row ; a drying and meeting-place for the women ; and a moping-ground for the men when they lacked the means to raise the latch of a pub. Then they would sit around the ashpit. Sometimes they would empty the ashpit to make a sort of cockpit of it. They would put a live rat, the biggest they could get hold of, and a veteran jackdaw that couldn't fly, down into the empty ashpit, then poke them with sticks to make them fight. That was in the ashpit. Sometimes the men themselves would fight each other bare-knuckle and stripped to the waist on the strip of ground



between the brook and the houses. This was frowned upon by the people of the row, for the recognized place for bare-knuckle fights, "the Twmp", was only a couple of hundred yards up the hill. There two men could fight it out without having their wives shrieking at them from their doorsteps.

A few couples in our row often quarrelled in a showy way. Most of those in the row shut and locked the door when they began to quarrel, not to give the neighbours a laugh. Our mam always did. But there were others who not only gave the neighbours a laugh. The whole town had a laugh, for people passing along the main road could hear 'em at it. They were in a minority, a minority composed of men and women who thought their houses too small to quarrel in properly. True, the table and a couple of chairs filled the one and only living-room, so there wasn't room for a man to let himself go properly. What with the kids hanging on to his legs, crying: "Don't hit our mam", and she herself the other side of the table with the baby in her arms. So out on to the communal strip of ground he would run, and after he had spat on his hands, shouted as loud as he could: "Come out here, you cow, you, come out here so as I can settle you." The woman was never so foolish as to accept such an invitation. She stayed on the doorstep with the baby in her arms, telling the man what she thought of him. The neighbours had their laugh before the man would say, "Oh, go to hell", then rush across the nearest of the two bridges and into the nearest pub to drink all the beer he could buy and have on strap till pay-day. All the people in Tai-Harry-Blawd were not like that. There were a few tidy families, tidy in their ways, I mean. People who locked their doors on the inside when they could see they were bound to quarrel; these people often went to chapel on Sundays. Ours was one of the "tidy" families of the row.

Having described the outer features of Tai-Harry-Blawd, a word now about the inside of our house, which is practically the same as all the other houses in the bottom front row. The great difference between the bottom and top houses was that the bottom houses had an upstairs, the top houses didn't. In front of our house was a bit of wall, and inside the wall was our coal-cwtch, or place to hide the coal. Not that there was any need to hide it, for everybody had coal. However, our mam called the bit of wall and the coal-cwtch—above which she used to keep hanging from a six-inch nail the tub dad washed hisself all over in every night of the week except Sunday

and the days when there was no work, and in which she used to wash all us children on Saturday nights—and out there where she kept the tub she called “the bailey”.

We children will always remember that “bailey”, as mam called it, and as we all called it after her. For the pack of hounds which Major Jones kept in the hound-house on the road to Pontsarn once jumped the little wall into our “bailey”—and some of them came right into our house after our little Skye terrier, Gyp, which the hounds had no doubt mistaken for something else and had chased her across from the main road, across the bridge, the top bridge, not the bridge the engine used, and into our “bailey”—and a few of them into the house, where they yapped until the huntsman came after them on his horse and called them out. It was the talk of the place for a long time.

Inside our house there was not a lot of room. The table, dad’s high-backed armchair, two small kitchen chairs and a three-legged stool, and the chest of drawers as well, filled the one and only living-room. The table had to be pushed back tight against the wall to make room for dad to wash himself in the tub before the fire. There were two bedrooms, a tiny one downstairs—on the right going in and one a bit bigger upstairs. Dad had to bend double when going upstairs, so did our mam. They had to squeeze themselves flat to get past our bed to the bed in which they slept with the baby. About the time I had my leg broke our mam put up a sort of partition between our bed and the bed in which she slept with dad and the baby.

When we were all in bed we could hear as plain as anything what the people in the house above us were saying and doing, for there was only the thickness of the bit of board between us above the rafters against which dad used to knock his head when he forgot himself and straightened himself up. Our upstairs window was about the size of dad’s big coloured pocket handkerchief. There was no back way to our house, for the back wall was built against the foot of the hill.

We nearly always had a dog, and the breed was Skye terrier, which dad thought was the best ratters. He took our dog with him to the pit during the day, but at night the dog was in the living-room downstairs. Once when we didn’t have a dog some rats from the brook came across into our house by night and ate the tops of dad’s pit-boots, and next morning he had to go to the pit in his best boots. Before the week was out he had another dog. The rats which had runs under the

road from the brook into the houses liked the tops of pit-boots because they were always well-oiled to keep them soft. If mam ran out of shoe-oil for a couple of days our dad's pit-boots went as hard as iron, and he used to swear then when trying to force his foot into them in the morning.

The Welsh were in a minority in Tai-Harry-Blawd, where they were mixed with English, Irish and Scotch people, whose fathers and grandfathers had been brought into Wales by the old Iron Kings. At first I knew only Welsh from my parents and grandparents, but as I went on playing with the Scott, Hartley, Ward and McGill children, I became more fluent in English than in my native language. Dad was annoyed when I started replying in English to what he had said in Welsh, but our mam said, in Welsh: "Oh, let him alone. What odds, anyway?"

"Plenty of odds," dad said. However, it was seldom I saw our dad, and when I did he rarely spoke. But I was playing about with the children who couldn't speak Welsh from morning till it was time to go to bed at night, and from them I learnt not only to speak their sort of English; I also learnt many of their far from harmless tricks. One of the boys whose lead we followed was, so several of our neighbours said, born to be hung. Sure enough, he was hung when he was a grown man.

There were many interesting men and women living in Tai-Harry-Blawd, though few of them could read a word of Welsh or English. Our dad was one of the few. He could read a little Welsh and English, sing Welsh and English songs, and speak in both languages, but it was Welsh he preferred to speak. There were some lovely women living in Tai-Harry-Blawd. Inclined to stoutness, most of them, but they were lovely all the same. Our mam was the loveliest, I thought. But Saran McGill was lovely too. Then Jane Jones, whom we boys called Jane Fat, was lovelier than any of the women of the row from the shoulders up—ay, lovelier than our mam. She used to sit, Jane Jones, I mean, out on the "bailey" of her house, which was the end house of both bottom and top rows. One rounded her house to go up around the back to the top houses where our mam's mother and father lived. So I used to see Jane Jones sitting out on her "bailey" combing her long hair. Seated there she looked like a queen, for she had noble features, lovely eyes, and hair down below her waist. Sitting there the mountain of fat from her neck down was not so noticeable. My granter many times told me that

he remembered Jane Fat when she was altogether lovely, remembered when he could span her waist.

Like most other women in the row she had many children, girls all. After she had combed her own hair she would, out on the "bailey" where everyone could see, hunt the children's heads. Her husband was George Jones, a little man with a ragged moustache. Jane had a sister who was a very good dressmaker, she too was very stout. Then there was old Mrs. Rees, who told fortunes, and who used a lot of high-dry snuff. Tom Scott, whose nose was broke, and his wife. They had an Aunt Sally three-balls-a-penny standing which they used to erect out on the main street when the town was on holiday. Mrs. Davies "the butter" lived and sold farmhouse butter in the bottom house. And ever so many others.



### CHAPTER III

## THE TWO JOHNS

"**W**HERE are you taking him, dad?" my mother cried as we were passing our house. She was seated out on the "bailey" giving our Frank the breast; and I could tell that granser didn't like her sitting there with her bodice open, for, before he replied he muttered something about not knowing what the world was coming to when women sat outside their houses giving children the breast and hunting the children's heads.

"I'm taking him for a bit of a walk down the road," he said. "According to your mother, that's to be my job from now on. P'raps you'd like me to take them other two in the shawl as well."

Our mam laughed out loud. "You'll have your hands full with him. The two Johns—never mind, off you go." She laughed again; and I pulled at granser.

Over the bridge and out on to the main street we went. Once out on the street granser talked and talked, pointed out this place and that, this thing and that. Buildings. "That was built by your father's father when he was alive. Poor fellow fach, he never lived to see you. Frank the mason, they called him, Johnny." According to him my father's father, who died before I was born, had built ever so many places in our town. "Your father's father could start a house—ay, an' finish it, Johnny. He didn't wait, like some of these we've got to-day, for carpenter, plasterer an' tiler. No, he could do it all hisself, Johnny. Right from the foundation to the tilings. But he was took, poor fellow fach, when he was about fifty; an' your father's mother wasn't long after him. As tidy a man an' woman as ever . . ."

He went on talking as we slowly moved along the narrow street crowded with the people of the new steel age. The iron age had ended, the steel age had begun, was what was young learnt by me owing to my having to listen to the conversations between my granser and the other old puddlers

whom he was for ever meeting and standing to talk to on the street. They lamented over the death of iron, and shook their heads and sighed as they talked of the steel rails which were now being rolled at the Dowlais and Cyfarthfa works. I kept trying to pull granser away from the old men he talked to. Coal, iron and steel meant nothing to me just then. The street, the street of wonders, along which my progress was continually being delayed by old men who talked and talked, was what I wanted to see and see and talk about. The four-in-hand Merthyr-Dowlais bus, as the horses breasted the hill rising from Pontmorlais Square, I was content to stand and watch until it was out of sight, but as for standing whilst granser "passed the time o' day", as he called his long talks, with old men who like himself were finished and done for by steel, well, that was most annoying.

"Whose little boy is that, John?" was what they would say to granser after hearty and elaborate greetings.

"This is my gel's oldest boy—his name is John too."

"Oh, your Marged's oldest boy."

"No, no, Saran's oldest boy. Well, how are things with you?"

Forgetting all about me, they went on talking. Having endured this for some time, I discovered a way of breaking up their talks. On the narrow pavements there were stands on which goods were displayed for sale by the people whose shops were not designed for the display of goods. So they brought the goods out and displayed them on stands which took up the whole of the pavement along the shop's frontage. So as the old men and granser talked I put out my hand to take things off the stands. Cakes, fruit, sweets, brandy-snaps—pigs' feet. Nine times out of ten I was seen by the shop-keeper, who, after he had taken whatever it was I had stolen from me, would want to know from granser what he was thinking about to allow me to go about stealing. "If you don't watch that boy he'll grow up to be a thief."

So granser had to keep his eye on me, which he couldn't do and talk and talk to the other old men all the time. But he had to talk to someone, and evidently I was better than nothing. He talked to me as we went hand-in-hand along the street day after day. Having been born in 1820 he could remember ever so much he had seen with his own eyes, and heard for himself; then he could also remember a lot of what his father told him, all of which he told me as we went about together. Every step of our way recalled some-

thing to his mind. Being inattentive it was little of what he said that I committed to memory, for before he could interest me he had to remember something more striking than I was seeing on the street with my own eyes. A few things which he said about soldiers ; the great Lord Nelson ; and Trevethick's wonderful engine ; and the players at the theatre who were turned out of their lodgings by order of the deacons of Pontmorlais Chapel, stuck in my mind because I was interested in soldiers, sailors, engines, and players. In any case, I was bound to remember a little of what he told me, for he told me the same thing again and again.

He related to me what his father had told him about the coming to Merthyr of the Dragoons in 1800. Drawn swords, with which they sliced dogs in half, and the crowns off old men's high hats. They had come to cow those who in their fierce hunger had looted the company shop down by the Angel. Two of the hungriest of the men were taken to Cardiff to be hung. He showed me the Star public house where Nelson and Lady Hamilton had put up the time when Nelson came to see the great Cyfarthfa Works. Showed me where Trevethick started the first steam-engine that ever pulled a load behind it. Seventy tons of iron and seventy passengers on top of the iron Trevethick's engine had taken nine miles.

"All that was *before* my time, Johnny," he would remind me. "But"—each time we neared the Castle Hotel he would stop to point and say—"what happened there in '31 I seen with these two eyes. Heard the shots which the Scotch highlanders fired from in there, Johnny, and seen the people fall. Nobody knows how many was killed by here where we're standing that time, Johnny, for people was afraid to say about them that was carried to their homes to die. But it's safe to say that the soldiers killed twenty, Johnny. No soldiers killed. But they hung Dic Penderyn down Cardiff before he was twenty-three because, so they said, he had wounded one of the Scotch highlanders." After he had sighed and shaken his head he would say : "No, the poor boy was as innocent as you, Johnny. But they hung him all the same."

Sometimes he would chuckle as we passed Pontmorlais Chapel. "That mother of yours, she'd die if she was stopped to go to what she calls 'the threatre'. Good job for her some of the deacons who used to be at Pontmorlais are in their graves. They wouldn't 'low members of this chapel to have people from the theatre under their roof. Made 'em



turn 'em out on to the street. Now, of course—— But that's how things change."

We were always meeting our relations on the street. Uncles and aunties, the aunties with cousins in arms. Our mam's brothers and sisters ; dad's brothers and sisters. Their wives, husbands and children. Roaring Uncle Harry ; quiet Uncle Daniel. Talk, talk, talk, until I began to think that I was related to everybody in town.

One day granser and I met my Uncle Harry on the pavement outside the Owen Glyndwr public-house, and granser told him to go on home before he got himself into more trouble. Uncle Harry went off towards the Drill Hall, and granser stood watching him until he was lost to sight. Then he sighed, and stood with a far-away look in his eyes for a time before he told me the same old story about the club walk which had ended with a grand assembly on Pontmorlais Square. There had been a prize for the handsomest young married couple on parade that day, and he and granny had won the prize. He had worn a new bottle-green coat that day, but he couldn't quite remember what granny had on altogether. Goodness knows how many times he told me that same story about the club walk and about him and granny winning the prize for the handsomest young married couple on parade that day.

Granser was not what you can call well the day the new hospital was opened. Henry Richard, M.P., was either dying or had just died, and granser thought there was no one alive to compare with Henry Richard, our senior M.P. Uncle Harry wanted to take granser to have rum hot, but granser said no. Our dad was with Uncle Harry that day, more fool him, for Uncle Harry was always playing tricks on our dad. Still, they were together, and in agreement about the new hospital. They said quite a lot. Uncle Arthur, the distant uncle who always gave us children pennies, was saying thank goodness for a hospital at last.

"You're right, 'at last'," roared Uncle Harry. "They've built it for shame's sake at last. An'—you watch now—it's we'll have to pay for it in the long run, same as we've had to pay for everything else——"

"Too true," our dad said.

"The last thing they thought about," said my Uncle Harry. "Humph, the lords an' ladies we've made 'em. They made canals to Cardiff——"

"And the railway," said our dad.

"I'm talking," said my Uncle Harry. "Castles to live in ; banks to keep their money in—every damned thing 'cept a hospital. For about a hundred an' thirty years they've done their eye-good out of us ; an' for a hundred an' thirty years we've been getting smashed up an' blown up without a place to get patched up in——"

"What about the workhouse infirmary?" said Uncle Arthur.

"What tidy man would 'low hisself to be taken there?" our dad said.

"I'm talking," said my Uncle Harry, "an' I know what we've had—an' what we haven't had." He pointed to granser. "Here's my father after working since he was a child in arms for 'em——"

"Never mind me ; you look after yourself," said granser. Then to me he said : "Come on, Johnny."

"Come with me now an' have that rum hot for your chest," said my Uncle Harry.

"Ay, come on," said our dad.

"I'm going home with this boy," granser said firmly.

He was bad all the time after that, but he went out to see the voting when Pritchard Morgan was voted into Henry Richard's place.

One fine day after that, he took me and my brother Billa for a long walk. Our mam had a new baby, so Billa had been forced off the breast as I had been, and was now turned over to granser, who took us both for a long walk up to a high place, from where the whole district was to be seen from Dowlais Top down the Vale to Troedyrhiw.

Granser was breathing a bit fast all the time we were up there. After he had caught his breath a bit he said : "There it is. Pits, works ; the talk and wonder of the world. All over the world they've been talking of Merthyr an' Dowlais. Ay, and of Penydarren and Plymouth works when they was going. I've worked in 'em all, an' now . . ."

He was talking when Billa and I went across to the hedge to look for blackberries, but before we got to the hedge I stopped to see if I could see our house from up there. I couldn't be certain. For long I looked right from where Dowlais began to shape itself below the uplands to follow the huge works down to Penydarren. Then the derelict old Penydarren Works—our house must be somewhere near there. Yet I can't see it. My eyes next rested on the Cyfarthfa Castle and Works, all the operations of which could be noted

from one or other of the Castle's many windows. Then I turned to look away down to the right to where the old Plymouth Works were crumbling to ruin—— But what was the matter with granser? He was sitting where we had left him, but now his head was in his hands——

"Look, our Johnny," said Billa, showing me blackberries.

I took him by the hand and with him walked back to where granser was sitting. He sat up and said: "Hullo, my boys. Come on, we'll go home now."

That was the last time he was out, I believe. A lot of old people in Tai-Harry-Blawd and along the Tramroad died about that time, and granser and granny were two of them. Now we didn't have any gransers or grannies, so from that time on I had to look after the children who needed looking after. After granser and granny were dead and buried the few things left in the little house up around the back were divided into three lots—though all of it wasn't what could properly be called a lot. Uncle Harry had a few things. Auntie Marged had a few things, and our mam had a few things. A young couple who were not related to us went to the landlord to ask for the house and got it.



## CHAPTER IV

### "THE REG'LAR VILLAIN"

**A**FTER granser and granny had "gone to the Cefn", as the people of Tai-Harry-Blawd said of those gone to their graves in the Cefn new cemetery, I became our mam's right-hand man. Instead of sending me to school as Mrs. Davies sent her Ivor, she kept me home to mind the baby, whose name was Blodwen, and run errands. To Thomas the butcher's for a pork chop off the loin for dad when he came home from the pit; to the Penydarren End for a pint of beer in a quart bottle for dad when he came home from the pit; and to anywhere else she wanted to send me.

The errands to town I was delighted with; but the nursing of our Blodwen in the shawl Welsh fashion I hated. But our mam knew how to handle me, for each time I pulled a face when she told me to get the shawl to take Blodwen for an airing she would say: "All right, if you won't be a good boy and nurse her for me in the shawl whilst I'm washing the clothes, then you shan't come to the threatre with me to-night."

That always sent me running for the shawl in which to nurse our Blodwen, for the little thruppenny horrible was heaven to me, and to go there with our mam I would do anything, suffer anything. It had a "reg'lar villain" whose thrilling performances I was ready to suffer any and everything to witness. I was privileged to know him on and off the stage, for he lodged not far from our house with a widowed woman. His name on the bills of the play was Cavendish, and the theatre he played in was Sinclair's, a wooden-walled and canvas-roofed temple which had been fitted up in the old Penydarren Works, just off the main street, about two minutes' walk from our house. It had thruppenny benches at the back on which it was not wise to get too excited, as we often did, with the result that we had to do a little rough-and-ready carpentry with a stone after the bench had collapsed under about a dozen of us. The sixpenny benches in the middle were more substantial. Then there were two rows of chairs at a shilling for those our

mam referred to as "the big people". We, mam and us children, were "thruppennies", though it was only for herself mam paid that amount. Most of us she pushed in before her, saying to the checker: "Yes, I've got the tickets." But it was only her own thruppenny ticket she had, with which she rushed us all past the checker. "Two of them'll be on my lap"—then pointing to me—"and that boy'll have the baby on his lap." With the exception of holiday times she managed to get us all in on the one ticket. If the player-manager, on finding that the crowded "thruppenny" section of the house was somehow or other not reflected in the takings he had come from behind to check with make-up on, afterwards came back to investigate, he would find me with Blodwen on my lap, our mam with Billa and Frank on her lap, and all the other women with a couple of children apiece on their laps. Very few men attended the theatre then. We all looked straight to our front as the player-manager, ready made-up, had a whispered consultation with the checker, who, after a counting of heads, shrugged his shoulders helplessly. On with the play, was the message our feet stamped.

When we boys used to see Cavendish on his way to the theatre in the evenings, we used to wonder how it was possible for such a mild-looking little man as we then saw to transform himself into the bloodthirsty villain we saw on the stage break up happy homes, stab people in the back, order the flogging of Uncle Tom—nothing was too bad for him. He was a double-dyed and most indispensable villain. He was ill for a time, and whilst he was ill the place was half-empty, for it was nothing without Cavendish, the "reg'lar villain". I was there, we were all there with our mam the night he returned to thrill us after his illness. The place was packed to suffocation to see Cavendish in action again. During the interval between the end of the drama—in which there had been four polished off by Cavendish before he himself was polished off—and the farce, he made a brief speech of thanks for the reception we had given him. Cavendish never appeared in the farces.

The acting of Cavendish was ample reward for what I suffered as nurse to our Blodwen. Anyway, most of the other first-born sons of that most prolific of rows had to nurse their mother's youngest in the shawl Welsh fashion. We were a band of expert male nurses, each able to play marbles, buttons and other games whilst nursing a baby. With the ends of the shawl firmly grasped by one hand, we knelt to shoot marbles

with the other. As we knelt in turn each of our babies nose-dived, to come upright again with us.

There was only one bad sport and cheat in our band, and he was known as "hit me with the baby in my arms", which was what his mother always said when quarrelling with his father. This boy said exactly the same when, after we had caught him cheating, we up fist to strike him. "Go on, hit me with the baby in my arms," he said. What could we do? There he was, holding the ends of the shawl with one hand—and *our* marbles in the other. His baby, looking as sober as any judge, staring us out, a sure shield against our anger and our fists.

It was when chasing "hit me with the baby in my arms"—though neither of us had babies that day—that I was knocked down by a horse that pulled its heavy coal-cart over my right leg to break it. It was more old broken-nosed Tom Scott's fault than mine, for he was drunk in charge of the horse which he was beating around the corner with the spare end of the reins. He was a house-coal haulier, and he had had tips with every load delivered that day, that's if the state he was in was anything to go by. The house-coal haulier who followed him around the corner, when he picked me up, turned to Tom Scott and said: "The wonder to me is that you didn't kill all the kids in town, you damned fool." Then he carried me over the bridge and into the house to our mam.

Someone had run to fetch the doctor, so mam laid me flat on the table to wait for him. She shut the door after she had sent the boys who stood gawping outside away, then she came to sit by me. With our Blodwen in her arms, and Billa and Frank standing one each side of her, she talked to me. Didn't say much of anything, but enough to make me ashamed to cry any more. Touched me once or twice. My hand, and then my face. It was enough.

The family doctor for whom we waited was Dr. Ward, one of our district's most capable and hard-working colliery doctors. We called him "our doctor" because dad paid him twopence out of each pound he earned to look after us all. That was deducted out of dad's earnings whether we wanted looking after or not; and from the earnings of the thousands of other men and boys working in pits and works. If they worked in the Cyfarthfa works or pits they had to have Dr. Webster; if in the Plymouth collieries, Dr. Ward; if in the Dowlais works or pits, a doctor whose name I forget. There were private doctors as well, of course. Dr. Biddle, whose children, especially



the girls, were the loveliest children in town. Anyway, we all had our own doctors, our own family doctors. If dad left his employment with the Plymouth colliery company to go to work in one of the Cyfarthfa or Dowlais pits, then we changed our family doctor, for each company had its own doctor, and the company's workmen had to have the company doctor. Being as they were all good doctors it didn't much matter which a family had ; but with a broken leg I was waiting for Dr. Ward, who happened to be "our doctor" about that time.

It was a long time before he came, for he was out somewhere on his rounds when the one who ran for the doctor got to the surgery. So was his assistant, so the message was left. "He won't be long," mam said. We waited, and mam said how busy each of the company doctors must be, for they each had thousands of families to look after. Then there was the accidents in all the levels and pits and the two great works of Dowlais and Cyfarthfa. The new hospital was full all the time, and they all had patients there to visit and tend every day. In their gigs and traps they're off from early morning till late at night—then there's surgery twice a day.

Mam talked about doctors and all the work they had to do, about one thing and another until my auntie Marged, our mam's elder and only sister, came in with her breath in her fist. She lived up in Penyard, which is "head of the yard" in English. Her house had a back, and a nice bit of garden in front, and it was up on the breast out of the stink of the Morlais brook. "I've only just heard," she said. "How much have he had?"

"The doctor haven't been to see yet," said our mam.

"I heard it was Tom Scott—the flat-nosed old thing as he is—that done it. Wait till I lay my hands on him."

Before the words were quite out of her mouth Auntie Ann, my uncle Harry's wife, hurried in : "Oh, God help us, our little ones are not safe once they're out over the doorstep. How much have he had, Saran fach?"

"We're waiting for the doctor, Ann."

Next my aunts Saran and Liza, our dad's two youngest sisters, called on their way home from their work in the brickyard. Their hair was still tied in what they hid it away from the brickdust. There they were, all talking, when the doctor came to drive them all out of the house. "Anything we can do, doctor?"

"No, the mother and I'll manage," he said.

They did. Before dad came home from the pit my leg was well and truly set, and the doctor had hurried off back to the surgery, where he said there was half the town waiting for him. As soon as dad got home and heard about it from our mam, he came upstairs in his pit-clothes to see me. Not right up, but high enough up the stairway to bring his face level with mine. He smiled a tired smile, his teeth showing white in his grey-black face. "Never mind," he said. His face was also streaked where rivulets of perspiration had during the day been running down it. The shine of his gold-wire ear-rings had been dulled by roof-moisture, and the ends of his moustache were curling upwards towards his mouth. This I could see because his face was so close to mine. "Never mind, Johnny fach," he said, as he began to descend to the living-room. "You'll come." He was out of sight.

. . . . .

With my leg in plaster of Paris I lay on my back watching the bugs walking upside-down across the ceiling. The days were long, and the nights were longer. My leg was itching worse than ever. People brought me things, Ivor Davies's mother more than any. Fruit, and illustrated papers. The light was bad, the one window being so small. Our mam sat with me for as long as she could, and one day when she was sitting upstairs with me she told me that the bobby greencoat had been to ask why it was I hadn't started school, and that my brother Billa would have to start school the Monday following.

"I wish I could read," I said, holding one of the papers with pictures on that Mrs. Davies had brought me.

"So do I," said our mam, "but none of us children can read. None of us had any schooling, but our Ike, your uncle who's in America somewhere, learnt somehow to read a bit when he was in the army. You know, your uncle that was in the Zulu War, the one whose name is in that frame downstairs. Somebody in the army must have taught him to read a bit. Yet he don't write home from America. Of course, your father can read lovely in Welsh and English. One night I'll get him to read what's under them pictures for you. I must go down now."

The following Sunday afternoon dad read to me all that was printed below the full-page pictures, but he didn't tackle any of the full pages of printed matter that divided one picture page from another. "You can read grand, dad," I said.

"No, not so grand," he said. "Though plenty good enough for what reading I've got time to do. I can thank my father for my bit of schooling, for it was he, not my mother, who made us go for a couple of years before starting to work. Now, your mother—but there, women got enough to do about the house without reading. Ay, if it's only fighting these bugs," he said as he struck with the picture paper he was holding at a bug that had dropped from the ceiling down on to my bed. Then he went downstairs again.

Whilst I was lying in plaster of Paris another new baby came. Came quietly to mother in the room the other side of the partition, the room in which mother said she was going to lie down for a bit. The old midwife passed my bed in and out, going in to our mam and coming out, and it was she told me that I had another brother. I had heard him crying. For six days our mam was not to be seen, but my auntie Marged was there to look after us most of the time, and when she wasn't there Auntie Ann was. On the Saturday after they had finished work at the brickyard my aunts Saran and Liza came to do all the washing, and on Sunday they came to clean the house and cook dinner and things.

Our mam, looking lovelier than ever, got up on the Sunday afternoon. She stood, smiling, and holding up the new baby, against the footrail of the bed I shared with Billa and Frank at night.

"Do you like him, Johnny?" she said. "His name is David—after your father. Lovely, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's grand," I said indifferently. My leg was itching. "My leg's itching awful," I said.

"They do say it's getting better when it itches."

"Do they?" I said, not troubling to inquire who the "they" were. "I'm glad you're better again, mam. I wish I was better too, then I could go to the theatre with you."

"Well, it won't be Sinclair's threatre, for that's packed up an' gone away."

"Who said?"

"Your auntie Ann."

"An' is Cavendish gone too?"

"Yes, they're all gone bag an' baggage whilst you an' me was upstairs in our beds. All the leading actors—Cavendish; the sportsman; the woman who played the leading parts; and the one who always acted the old man—had benefits. But Cavendish had the biggest. He played 'Lagadare', I think your auntie Ann said. But don't you fret, for there'll be a



new an' bigger threatre the other side of the brook by the time you're up and about again."

"Who said?"

"Your auntie Ann."

"Will Cavendish be with the new theatre?"

"No. Your auntie Ann said that it's some John Lawson's the big man of this new threatre. But I must go down now— Here, look at the pictures in these books Mrs. Davies brought you."

After she had gone down I concentrated on the pictures in an effort to forget the itching, but it was no use. The days were bad enough, but the nights, with Billa and Frank one each side me, were worse. Now I suppose we'll have Blodwen at the foot of the bed. We didn't, for mam kept her at the foot of her bed. The itching. If only I could get at it to scratch it. After I had cried through one night our mam sent down to ask the doctor to call in when he was passing.

When he came our mam said: "He's been nearly off his head, doctor. Crying an' screaming. You said it was time the leg wanted, so I didn't like to bother you."

"That's all right, Mrs. Jones. To tell you the truth, I'd forgotten all about him. I've more people to keep in mind than there are minutes in the day. Now, Johnny, let's see what we can do for you. Oh, heavens!" he cried, as he started stripping my leg of the hardened casing of plaster of Paris. "It's alive. Itching? It's a wonder he hasn't been eaten alive. If I had my way I'd blow up this lousy, bug-infested— Let me get my coat off— Don't put it down there. Take it out to the trap to my man." Our mam did, and the doctor went on stripping my leg. What a relief. "Yes," the doctor said when our mam came back upstairs, "we're getting on with it— Could you get me a bucket or something to put this stuff in?" Our mam fetched him the ash-bucket, the bigger of our two ash-buckets which we also used to carry our load of coal from where it was tipped into our coal-cwtch.

"Oh, look at them," said the doctor shudderingly as he dropped pieces of plaster of Paris into the big bucket.

"Yes, I know, doctor," our mam said, "but indeed I can't help it. I've tried everything—"

"No doubt you have— Now we can see the leg." He ran an experienced hand over it. "Johnny, we've made a good job of it. After a week or two on crutches you'll be nimbler than ever. But don't fall off any more walls."

"It was under a coal-cart he had it broke, doctor."

"Was it?"

"Yes. That Tom Scott who lives up in the back row——"

"Yes, I think I remember—— Get rid of that stuff in the bucket. Will it burn, I wonder—— My coat—— Oh, yes, out in the trap. That bandaging will do for the present—— Start him on crutches as soon as you like. Bring him down the surgery next week or the week after—— Ask to see me. Good-bye, Johnny—— Oh, this stairway. Good day, Mrs. Jones."

## CHAPTER V

### TO SCHOOL LATE

AFTER two weeks on crutches, followed by a week's dependence on a stick, to school rather late in life. "Never mind, I'll show you," Billa, my junior by a year and a quarter, said. He had already passed from the babies into the second class of the infants' department of St. David's School. "I expect they'll put you in the babies' class, our Johnny," he said, as we were getting ready for school.

"You may as well take Frank with you, Johnny, for he may as well start now as later," said our mam.

Ivor Davies, who had been tending school from the time he was first breeched, called as he was passing. "Go on now with Ivor," said our mam. Off we went across the bridge and out on to the main street, along which many boys and girls were hurrying to school, some like us to St. David's School, others to the British School over on the British Tip. It was grand, I thought, to be out in the stream of life again after having been so long in that little room with my leg in plaster of Paris. I hadn't ventured to travel the usually busy main street on crutches, or when limping about with the aid of the stick, so this was my first morning for nearly a year to see the Pontmorlais Square.

Here on the Square the children on their way to the two schools went right and left, those attending the British School—which was also called Abermorlais School—turned right; those attending St. David's went straight on down. Oh, how grand it was. With our Frank's hand in mine I walked the pavement. On my right, in the gutter, Ivor Davies, who had been for long attending school, walked and talked about the school. Our Frank was snivelling—not much though—in fear of what was before him; Billa, walking behind us, telling him not to be a big baby. Dai Hughes ran down the lane leading from the Tramroad, past Dix's stables and public-house, to join us on the main street. Ivor and Dai were my two best friends; it was Ivor's mother who had, with gifts of fruit and



picture papers, helped me to endure my long confinement in plaster of Paris. She, Ivor's mother, "Mrs. Davies the coalyard", as she was best known, was the good angel of the people of Tai-Harry-Blawd. She was "a lady with a heart of gold", as poor old drunken Mrs. Scott used to say. She, Mrs. Davies, not Mrs. Scott, lived with her husband and two boys in a big house, one of three, just across the bridge from our house. Our house was on the left bank; hers on the right bank of the brook. From the back of her house she kept a pitying and generous eye on those of us who lived in Tai-Harry-Blawd, and whenever there was anything the matter with any of us, irrespective of whether it were Baptist Welsh, Catholic Irish or English Church, Mrs. Davies the coalyard always helped. Her husband, Harry Davies, was a machinist at Jenkins' the builder's yard between the Taff and the Canal just below the Iron Bridge. It was said that he earned good wages; and that Mrs. Davies earned even more than he did by selling coal in the coalyard which was managed—well, looked after by an old woman, and sometimes a boy to help her. Harry Davies never bothered much with us Tai-Harry-Blawd people, for he had plenty to put up with. He had a lame leg; he could only walk slowly with the aid of a thick stick, and the way he moved along suggested that he had something seriously wrong with his hip. Mrs. Davies was willowy and light on her feet, and her face always shedding radiance as her hands did help.

Now I was on my way to school with her son, Ivor, and Dai Hughes and our Billa and Frank. Everything on the street seemed miraculous that morning to me after nearly a year's enforced absence. I looked right and left as the others talked. Pontmorlais and Zoar Chapels, the Castle Hotel, which reminded me of granseur without making me feel even a little sad. I remembered what he had told me of Dic Penderyn being taken to Cardiff to be hung at the age of twenty-three; and of the Scotch highlander soldiers shooting the Merthyr people down from the windows of the Castle Hotel. But that was all over; my leg was better again, and I was bubbling inside with joy as on my way to the school to which the school attendance officer, "the bobby greencoat", as we called him, had said I should have long before gone.

"Let's go an' see the cannons before going into the playground," said Dai Hughes.

"I've seen 'em before, many times," I said. So I had, when out with granseur. All the same, we followed Dai Hughes to

where the two cannons used in the Crimean War were standing one each side the Church entrance. They were black and glossy, and their mouths were, I believe, stopped up with cannon balls.

"Come on, or we'll have the cane for being late," said Ivor.

We followed him out of the churchyard and into the playground, where there were a couple of hundred boys and girls playing. That morning was spent with Frank in the babies' class, but as a result of the little knowledge of letters I had somehow or other got from nearly a year's wrestling with the picture papers Mrs. Davies had given me, I was moved up that same afternoon, and it wasn't long before I caught Dai Hughes and Ivor Davies up. It was a grand school in some ways. The playground was not only a place where one could play, but also a reserved standing-place for us children of St. David's, a standing-place from where a couple of hundred yards of the busiest part of the town's main street could be closely observed. For only the width of the pavement separated the main street from the railings of our playground in front of our school. With our heads fitted tightly between two of the railings we could stand and enjoy the sights of the street when we were not inclined to play. In the window of a chemist's shop not a dozen yards away there were a few of those mysterious bottles of peculiar shape, and full of some liquids of different colours. That, we were told, was the shop of Thomas Stephens, the chemist, who was also the foremost literary figure of the town, if not of Wales. His *Literature of the Kymry* had made a great stir, so our teachers told us ; but it was those big and mysterious bottles of coloured liquids in his shop-window that stirred me most at that time.

Buses, brewers' drays, traps, gigs, floats, cabs and bicycles went along the street. Along the pavements two streams of people. Then there was another, smaller playground for boys only, at the back of the school, and the sight from there was the engine with its load of trucks, empty or loaded with house-coal, travelling the railway that we still called the Tramroad after Trevethick's epoch-making journey nearly a hundred years before. Yes, during the playtimes there was plenty to see.

Then at night, when the gas-lamps were all lit up, and the moon and the stars looked down on the challenging glare of furnaces and the tumbling fires of the fire-tips of Dowlais and Cyfarthfa Works. High up and away to the right the furnaces of Dowlais would first illuminate the district for miles around, and as though saying to the Cyfarthfa furnaces : "There,

better that if you can." Cyfarthfa would take up the challenge from low down, and away to the left front of our house. Same with their fire-tips of what we boys called "tumbling fires". Free and most wonderful nightly illuminations.

But what was that compared to the new theatre that had been erected on the right bank of Morlais Brook, less than twenty yards as the crow flies from our house? But to get to it we had to cross the bridge and round the corner of Mrs. Davies the coalyard's house, so by that route the theatre was a couple of hundred yards from our house. Something like a theatre this was—though John Lawson was not in my opinion, or our mam's, a better actor than Cavendish—if as good. But John Lawson's theatre was much more up-to-date in every way than Sinclair's had been. Looked more permanent, less "here to-day and gone to-morrow". No quarried stones or baked bricks were required for its building, but that didn't matter. It was, as our mam thankfully said, "a threatre", in which—well, one could forget Tai-Harry-Blawd and the bugs that had consolidated their position there.

Sometimes of a Sunday evening our mam took all us children to chapel, mostly to Zoar Chapel, and she sent all of us that could walk as tidy as she could to Zoar Sunday-school, for she was deeply, though not learnedly, religious. "God is good," was her simple creed. On that she rested with confidence never to be shaken. "God is good." With that she lived at peace with people of all creeds and denominations; and when she took us all to chapel with her she listened most reverently to what the preacher said—reverently, but never critically.

We liked going to the chapel with her, but not as much as we liked going to the theatre with her. But one wanted money to get into the theatre, and it was little money mam had to spare. So she got to hear that nearly every night something or other was wanted to furnish the different productions. There wasn't much in our house, but what there was they were welcome to it in return for a free pass for our mam and us children. We lived so close, mam and us children could deliver the furniture required, and collect it after the performance. Anything from our three-legged stool to our chest of drawers they could have for that bit of paper which was the "open sesame" into the cheapest seats for mam and us children—"a couple", that's all, was what she emphasized in her negotiations with the management. Yet she managed, as she had during the Sinclair seasons, to mostly rush us all in on the one complimentary ticket.



You see, she was always there when the doors were opened, and before the management could tell the kind of house it was going to be. With her two smallest in her arms, and the rest of us packed around her, she would smile as she handed the complimentary ticket to the checker as she passed with us in her train. Sometimes the checker would open his mouth after he had looked at the ticket and all of us, but before he could say much mam would shut him up with that smile of hers.

Sometimes, in addition to articles of furniture, she would lend her baby in arms, which she was never short of, to play, in the heroine's arms, an important part in plays requiring an innocent baby to melt its stern granter's heart in the last act. As there was a different play each night, and as most of them had a part for "my little one", "my chee-ild", etc., our mam's babies were in constant demand. The management could always rely on our mam for a baby.

Some of the other Tai-Harry-Blawd women grew jealous of mam, and they tried to get a share of the privileges mam enjoyed in return for our furniture and babies. Eventually Saran McGill, who lived in the top row around the back, managed to get her foot in, but not for long, for she disgraced herself in the eyes of the management the night "Nell Gwyn" was played. She had loaned two of her big baskets, "flasks", as the women of the row called them, for the leading actress and another actress to sell oranges, or pretend to sell oranges, in the first scene of act one. Our mam had loaned our high-backed armchair that night to serve as throne for the man who played King Charles the second. We saw our armchair, with a cushion on its seat, and red velvet down over the back, on a bit of a platform covered with thick red curtain cloth. But we knew that it was our armchair under the trimmings.

As usual we were waiting with mam for the doors to open, and as soon as they were opened we all went in on the one ticket. Saran McGill arrived later with her children, and her complimentary ticket which she received for the loan of her two baskets. By this time the cheapest part of the house was nearly full, and the manager himself was standing with the checker. He stopped Saran McGill's children, all except the one she was carrying in her arms. She started to argue with the manager, and she pointed to where we were sitting with our mam in the middle of us. "Then what about her?" Saran McGill cried. "She's got *all* her children with her."

"Will you please stand aside?" the manager said.

Out she went in a fret, taking the children with her. When

next we saw her it was on the stage. Soon after the curtain went up to reveal the two actresses pretending to sell oranges to the people who were supposed to be on their way into Drury Lane Theatre, Saran came on to the stage shouting : " Give me my baskets." She took them. The action of the play was suspended, and the curtain lowered for a few minutes ; and that was the end of Saran McGill's short-lived connection with that theatre.

But that was not such a sensation as George Jones created in a play called " Siberia ". He was one of three engaged to play the parts of convicts on their way to Siberia. Jane Jones, " Jane Fat ", as we called her, all that day whilst George was at his work in the pit, was telling the other women down by the water-tap : " My George is acting in the theatre to-night."

" Superin', you mean," said Mrs. Rowlands.

" I said acting—and I mean acting," said Jane.

George was late arriving home from his work in the pit, yet he turned into the Nelson with our dad for a pint on strap to wash the coal-dust down. Then he had another pint, so our dad said when he got home to find us all ready dressed to go with mam to the theatre. Jane Jones and her children were also ready dressed for the theatre, and annoyed with George because he had left it so late. He bolted his taters an' meat, hurriedly washed hisself all over, then ran across to the theatre to dress up as a convict on the way to Siberia. We saw him, and the other two supers, lying exhausted on the way to Siberia as the hero made a speech to us, after which he said long good-byes to his mother and sweetheart—but not before he told us that he was innocent of what he was being sent to Siberia for.

By this time George Jones was fast asleep on the stage, and when the villain pretended to kick him he did not move. The other two supers, Twm Rees and Wat Evans, got up at once, and as they had been told to get up by the man who promised 'em a shilling apiece for their night's work on the stage. The villain, who was dressed in soldier's clothes, with a sword at his side, shook George roughly to wake him up. When George did wake and opened his eyes to find a man with a sword at his side standing over him, he screamed, jumped up—not remembering where he was—and started letting out left and right. The action of the play was suspended, and the curtain lowered for a few minutes.

Our theatre-going was interrupted for a time by the arrival

of another new baby, who was named Isaac after our uncle who was somewhere in America. "P'raps dead out there," mam said. So she named the new baby after him. Now we were six children, and if our Raddy had lived we would have been seven. Things were getting what our mam called "tight" on us, both for room in our little house, and for boots and clothes. We didn't know our dad very well, for he was down the pit most days, except Sundays, until we were either in bed or over at the theatre. But what we did get to know from our mam was that he worked hard and long for little money.

Like most other men in the row, he took a drop of drink, even managed to get drunk on a shilling on Saturday nights. When drunk he would want his children to make a fuss of us, to sing to us, to tell us stories. Sundays he would sleep through, only getting up for meals. Seldom talked to us on Sundays—hardly looked at us. He looked drained, strained, emptied of vitality—and almost all his humanity—after six crushing days' work in the pit. "Don't bother your father, good children," mam would say. "Shush, don't make a noise, your father's sleeping." He wanted rest on Sunday, for at five o'clock next morning he would rise from his bed to start the next six days' endurance test in the pit.

So to ensure quiet I would take all the children except the last baby to Sunday-school. For years I took them to Zoar Sunday-school. Afterwards, under pressure of alien influences, or because most of the boys of Tai-Harry-Blawd went to Hope English Sunday-school, we also went English and attended Hope Sunday-school with the majority of Tai-Harry-Blawd's children. But on the occasions when mam put on her bit of best on a Sunday evening, it was to Zoar Welsh chapel we went with her. We learnt that she had a lovely singing voice, and that she knew certain Welsh hymns off by heart. She never blinked her eyes as dad did when singing, I noticed. Like untroubled pools under harvest moonlight her eyes were. Sometimes, when there were revival services, she would take us all with her on Sunday evening to Pontmorlais Chapel, which was regarded as the most strict of our town's Welsh nonconformist chapels.

But our mam was by no means strict, for at Christmas-time she would allow us to go to the unsectarian ragged Sunday-school's breakfast, which was held in the day-school on the British Tip. There we would stuff ourselves before leaving with an orange and a bag of sweets apiece. As soon as we



arrived home from the free breakfast mam would send her three eldest with the basins and tickets down to St. David's School for the beef and pudding served out each year to the poor and deserving of our town. Twelve-hundred pounds of prime beef and hundreds of Christmas puddings were served out annually. Mam applied for tickets as "poor and deserving"—as she undoubtedly was—and we three eldest boys went to fetch it and carry it home to her.

Dad was not what you can call thankful for what came to us each Christmas through the Established Church of England and Wales, but mam said : "What odds where it comes from? It's better food than we're able to buy, isn't it? And we're entitled to it with this household as much, if not more, than a lot who gets more'n this. Thank God for it, I say. Come on, children."

## CHAPTER VI

### HURRAH FOR D. A. THOMAS

**I**N D. A. Thomas's first fight—for he was returned unopposed in '88—I and the other boys of Tai-Harry-Blawd sang his praises throughout the election campaign of '92. Decorated with his colours, we sang his election song up and down the main street until we were hoarse, and when it was over we were firmly convinced that it was our singing and nothing else that had placed him securely at the top of the poll. We eight-year-olds of Tai-Harry-Blawd thought the future Lord Rhondda a man worth fighting for, singing for, shouting for. "Running the roads," said our mam, who never allowed elections to excite her.

Well, I was at last free to run the roads after being nurse to each new baby from Blodwen to Ike. "Now let Billa nurse 'em as wants nursing for a change." I was out on the street shouting and singing and fighting for our man. "Hurrah for D. A. Thomas." Climbing railings I ripped my clothes; in fights other boys bled my nose.

Anyway, what else was there to do after school but "run the roads", as mam said. The theatre, John Lawson's theatre, had left our town; and on the site cheapjacks now sold everything from cough cure to grandfather clocks after a crowd had been attracted by singing salesmen who, their turns done, ran planks over the heads of the crowd encouraging people to bid for what the boss of the show was holding up to view on the stage with a backing of a variety of articles which he put up in turn. What good was that to me? I simply could not bear to stand and listen to the cheap jokes of the cheapjack's salesman-comedians. After Cavendish and Lawson they were an insult.

So I "ran the roads", ran errands for mam and the other women of the row. Fetched supper-beer for one; snuff for another. Fetched "high-dry" snuff for old Mrs. Rees, the fortune-teller, who never gave less than a penny; most of the other women only gave me ha'-pennies. Yet, generous though

the old woman was, I joined with other boys in an effort to worry the life out of her. She did tell fortunes to people who slunk across the lower bridge and into her house after dark. No sooner was the client inside the old woman's house than we boys of the row started our tricks, all sorts of tricks. "Tip-tap at the window", throwing stones at her door, shouting "fortune-teller" through the keyhole. We were encouraged by some of the women of the row who said: "Serve the old fortune-teller right." More often than not we frightened the old woman's clients away before she had a chance to tell them anything.

Our mam rather liked the old woman, whose daughter, Rhoda, mam had been friendly with up to the time they both married. "If I hear of you plaguing old Mrs. Rees I'll tan you, Johnny," our mam said.

Old Mrs. Rees was one of the few women in the row able to read, and perhaps that was one of the reasons why so many of the women of the row disliked her. Then she was so dirty. Dirt thick in the deep lines of her face, snuff-stains under her nostrils, and she had a snuff-browned moustache. Her eyes blinked water; and when she opened the door to me on my return with her "high-dry" snuff from Wake's the tobacconist, the smell that came out of the house in which she lived for the most part alone was even worse than the brook smell in the dry summers. Yet her slightly cracked voice was sad and sweet.

Her house was the nearest to the lower-end bridge, up on to which, when the brook was in flood, the rats climbed in droves to run for safety into Jim Holmes's stables and into any of the houses where there was neither dog nor tom-cat. Or they made a bee-line for the much larger stables where the bus-horses were kept. It was just here the old fortune-teller was living in torment by night, when we boys tried to prevent clients from staying long enough to enable the old woman to tell them what they had come to hear, and what they would have paid to hear had we not interrupted the hearing and frightened them away.

Old Mrs. Rees, in addition to her married daughter Rhoda, had a single son who was a plasterer by trade. He was fond of his drink, and was seldom home with his mother. She wore rusty black over a lot of other clothes all the year round. After I had been to fetch high-dry snuff for her several times I was no longer able to join the boys who when at a loose end of an evening would say: "Let's go down and play 'tip-tap' on Mrs. Rees's window."



I travelled the town "looking for hobbles", which was our way of saying we were on the prowl for something to do to earn coppers. I was discovering the town for myself. Free after school to roam its street, to see its shows. I swam in the locks of its canal, in its river. On Friday evenings and on Saturdays I sought "hobbles" in its sixty-year-old stone-built market, where I earned as much as a shilling in coppers some Saturdays, coppers which I proudly took home to our mam. On my way home from the market on Saturday nights I noted the many brilliantly lit and crowded public-houses.

Having taken in the town and its many sights, there was the country around. On the height overlooking the district was the ruin of the Castle which gave the stinking brook near which I lived its name. Morlais Castle, from where Gilbert the Red, son-in-law of Edward the First, had played havoc—so Miss Davies, the handsome cane-manipulator who firmly ruled standard three, had told us boys one Friday afternoon in school.

Miss Davies was almost as handsome as our mam, and, if anything, stronger. She smashed more canes on us boys of standard three than the male teachers did on their "standards". Her father was the licensee of the Wyndham public-house, and it was from her that I learned what Gilbert the Red, Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan, did to our people in the thirteenth century.

In addition to the castle of Morlais there was, quite near to it, Pontsarn the beautiful, where the River Taff was sweet and clean and unpolluted, and glorious to swim in. There were pools over which trees hung down to see their reflection in the clear sweet water. After a swim in one of these pools we boys wandered up to historic Vaynor, where, almost every Thursday throughout the summers, one or other of the district's many chapels was holding its annual Sunday-school treat. We begged slices of bread and butter and chunks of cake from the warm-hearted people of all denominations. Then back to the Blue Pool for an evening dip before singing our way home to bed.

The handsome, hefty, hard-hearted, cane-swinging Miss Davies also told us boys of her standard that the Waun Fair had been started by our Owen Glyndwr. A Queen Elizabeth's shilling and sixpence had been found up there on the Waun to prove how old established the Waun Fair was. Instead of going to school when it was next held, I turned right for Dowlais. Through Dowlais High Street I climbed to the

uplands called the Waun where the historic fair was in full swing. I was surprised to find that there were no swings and roundabouts as down on the fairground near Merthyr's Iron Bridge. Only horses and men. But what horses—and what men some of them were. Horses from tiny mountain ponies to heavy carters. Gypsies buying and selling crocks ; agents of the collieries on the look-out for good pit-horses. "All right, let's see it moving." Walk, trot, gallop. Bargaining, smacking of hands. "It's yours—let's have a drink on it." Better than any circus, I thought, and well worth the four cuts with the cane that Miss Davies administered the morning following.

Mam was worrying about our house, and running here and there in search of another bigger and better house, of which there were few going empty ; and when a decent house went empty it was always a question of "key-money". To get the key of a decent house those who were after it had to bid for the key, which fetched anything from a golden sovereign to three. As our mam rarely had a shilling, let alone a sovereign to spare, her efforts to get the key of a better house were bound to fail. That worried her, for we were eight in all in the house now. I went with her once to see if we could get a house in which an old widower had just died, down on the Tramroad. We were there in less than an hour after the breath had left his body, but, so the old man's married son told our mam, there had been many there before us after the key, which hadn't gone when we got there, for the old man's son said that he was not going to let it go under two golden sovereigns.

Mam sighed and said : "Come on, Johnny." I wondered how people sold the keys of houses they did not own. Mam explained. The landlords didn't mind who lived in the houses as long as they got their rent ; and when people left or died there was a transaction that the landlords were not concerned or interested in. "Well, never mind," I said. "It wasn't much bigger than our own house."

"I know, but it had a bit of a back, and a bit of garden in the front."

Thinking to take her mind off it I said : "Yes, and it's got the engine and trucks running back and fore in front of it, and p'raps our little Dave and Ike would be run over." Then I realized that that could happen to them in Tai-Harry-Blawd, and said no more. Mother, with her shawl over her shoulders—no hat on—walked in a thoughtful mood along

the Tramroad, as we called the two miles of colliery railway line which cut our town in two. There were whitewashed houses both sides the line, which in places almost touched the doorsteps of the houses. It was a sort of second-class main street, for there were several hundred houses each side the line, and a few public-houses each side as well. Also shops, all close to the line along which the engine and coal-trucks travelled daily. The colliers' train—"cwbs", we called that—also ran past the lower end houses night and morning, when a couple of thousand men and boys would board or leave the "cwbs" noisily.

"Don't you fret, mam, we'll get a better house. Wait till I start working, then we'll have one of them new houses."

But she was bound to fret, for it was another hot and dry summer, and the old fever was about again. There was hardly a drop of water in the brook in front of our door, where all that had been left by the spring rains stood up to stink awful. The water from the one tap trickled feebly throughout the summer, and there were days when it was turned off altogether. Mam lost a new baby before she could as much as name it.

When she was better we all stayed home from school to go blackberrying with her. Early in the mornings we started off to the farther woods where there had not been much picking done. As soon as she had got dad off to his work she called us to give us our breakfast. Off we went, mam carrying our smallest, Ike; Dave mounted my back; Billa carried the big basket; Frank the big milk-can which leaked, but was all right to carry blackberries home in. Blodwen carried the smallest basket, in which there was our "lunch" and a bottle of our mam's herb-beer, "small-beer", as dad called it.

Once in the woods mam spread her shawl for her two smallest to sit on, then she and the rest of us went at it. What a picker she was. After the big basket was filled we had our lunch, after which mam would tell us a story, "The Maid of Cefn Ydfa", or one of her other stories, with the birds in the trees singing an accompaniment.

"There, come on," she said, after she had told the story.

We all wired in to fill the big milk-can with blackberries. That done, we started for home, mam carrying her two smallest, me carrying the loaded milk-can, Billa and Frank carrying the loaded basket between them, and Blodwen carrying the food-basket and the empty small-beer bottle. We



hurried home as fast as we could for our mam and me to go round selling the blackberries whilst they were fresh to Davies, "shop-John" and Evans the bakehouse. What we failed to sell mam boiled, and as soon as it was cool enough spooned it out of the saucepan on to the chunks of bread she had cut for each of us.

The blackberry season was nearly over when Sanger's Circus came to our town. Mam and all of us saw what was free to all, "the grand turn-out", but I also managed to see all that went on that evening inside the big tent. After having been chased away at least a dozen times by the two black men on sentry-go outside the big tent, I sneaked in under a loose flap when the brass band was playing loud. I poked my head up between two pairs of feet belonging to a man and woman of understanding. They made room for me to sit between them. In fear and trembling I sat through an evening of fearful joy. What, I asked myself, what was Sinclair's or Lawson's compared to what I was seeing in the ring before me, on the trapeze above me? Such horses, such clowns.

No sooner had Sanger's packed up and gone than we had what we children of Tai-Harry-Blawd called "our own circus", Fossett's circus, not a tent, here to-day and gone to-morrow circus, but a circus put up to stay on the very spot where John Lawson's theatre had stood. Members of the family owning and performing stayed with Ivor Davies's mother. This circus settled down and soon became one of our town's institutions. It had everything a boy could ask for. Trapeze, tight- and high-wire, tumblers and acrobats, funny clowns and a few of the world's greatest bare-back riders. But no wild animals, no menagerie. Our mam didn't care a lot for the circus, she was all for the theatre. "A good play is what I likes," she said.

But we children were circus-mad. I went about after school each day seeking "hobbles" to get the coppers to go to the circus. One of the most popular features of that circus was "Dick Turpin's Ride to York—and the Death of Gallant Black Bess". The handsome, hard-riding dare-devil highwayman we cheered. We Merthyr boys had long cherished the memory of another Dick, Dic Penderyn whose name and innocence had been handed down to us by our fathers and grandfathers. Taken to Cardiff to be hung at the age of twenty-three for the wounding of one Donald Black. . . . So no wonder we cheered the circus Dick Turpin; and bit

our lips in an effort to restrain our tears as the gallant Black Bess was nightly carried off on a five-barred gate.

In the middle of this most memorable circus season our mam almost broke our hearts when she announced triumphantly that she had managed to get the key of a better and slightly bigger house up the hill away from the brook—and the circus. Up to Penyard she was moving us, up to where we would not be able to hear, when not able to be present ourselves, the laughs the clowns got, the crack of the ring-master's whip, and much more that we could hear almost on our doorstep.

Our faces were long as we helped our mam to move. There wasn't much to move up the hill to the new house, for mam threw beds and bedding down over the bridge into the brook, then went into debt up to her eyes for new for the house up the hill. "We're not carrying bugs up the hill," she said. "We've finished with them, thank God." But it was a long time before we had finished paying for the new beds and bedding.

## CHAPTER VII

### BUTCHER'S BOY

**W**HAT we children called "our new house" wasn't new at all, not one of the new houses they had started building about that time, but one of the cross-row of the three rows of whitewashed cottages known as Penyard. This little district was perched above the now derelict Penydarren Works, where Trevethick had constructed the first engine to draw a load behind it.

Still, it was a much better house than the one we had left to the bugs—and whoever else wanted to live there. For this house had a back-door leading to a tiny backyard, also a long and narrow patch of garden out the front. "A place for a clothes-line at last," mam said. There was a fine view from the front garden, for we were up above the town, and we could see all the town below, and right down the Vale of Merthyr. Looking about half-right over the town we could see the mountain beyond which was Aberdare and the way to the West. On the sky-line more to the right the ruins of Morlais Castle and Pontsarn. Looking over the right shoulder we saw Penydarren, Dowlais and its great works. Beyond Dowlais Top the tableland over which one went to the industrial valleys of Monmouthshire. Then, just below us, was the new hospital, with its clock by which mam regulated our clock. It was just like being on top of the world, we children thought.

The air was ever so much sweeter up there than what it was on the bank of Morlais Brook, the smell of which must have hit those investigators into conditions who said that our town was "beset with stinking pools and gutters. Bombay itself, reputed to be the filthiest town under British sway, is scarcely worse." Anyway, we were up out of the filth. The sanitary arrangements were better—everything was better in our new home.

Dad's two youngest sisters had long been waiting their chance to come and live with us. One evening after finishing



their day's work in the brickyard, they brought their things along to our house, to overcrowd it. "We'll manage somehow," mam said, "for it won't be for long, they're both courting strong. Their few shillings will be a help."

We needed help more than ever, for we had pulled through the hauliers' strike; and now that dad was working again his wages were nothing to brag about—and we had to find the so much a week mam had agreed to pay off the new beds and bedding, either that or have the beds taken from under us. Sometimes we had to take dad's watch to pawn to get money—and we had to be badly off, indeed, before dad's watch went to pawn for us. Dad was proud of his watch. To wear with it he had bought a long, very long thin silver chain, which went twice round his neck before the ends came through the armholes of his waistcoat to be linked to the finest watch in town.

Once on her way home from the pawnshop mam lost the money and the ticket of dad's watch—purse and all. Mam and us children hunted until it was dark, then after dark with candles. "The ticket of your father's watch is what I'm worrying most about," mam said. We didn't find her purse with the ticket and the money in it, but a man named Nicholas did. He was an engine-driver at one of the pits, and he was on his way home from work on the night-shift when he saw our mam's purse and picked it up. When he opened it and saw our name on the pawn-ticket—and address as well—he brought it up before he even went home to breakfast. Wasn't our mam thankful; and wasn't dad, when he came home from work that night, thankful too. We were all thankful.

With our dad's two youngest sisters who worked in the brickyard, we were ten in all in the three beds. Our youngest slept at the foot with dad and mam; Blodwen slept with our aunties Saran and Liza; and us four boys slept in the other upstairs bed. It was a tight fit. Not only was it tight for room, it was tight in every way. Mam said she wished I was old enough to start working in the pit with dad. She found me a week-end job, Friday after school and all day Saturdays, at Thomas the butcher's in Pontmorlais Square, which was a high-class family butcher's business. I was to have a shilling and a pound of sausage—providing there were any left at closing-time on Saturday night—for my week-end's work—"and he'll have his food, of course," said James Thomas, leaning on the butcher's knife.

"Of course," mam said.

"Then he can start right away," said James Thomas—this was Friday afternoon after school. "Go into the kitchen for tea, and after you've had a bellyful to eat, go out to the slaughter house to turn the sausage-machine for my son James."

I did. In the slaughter-house the eldest son, David John Thomas, was sticking pigs, and a man named Walter Curtis, who lodged with Nat Hartley's mother on the Tramroad, was dressing sheep and cleaning up. All the waste blood and things they swept down a channel into Morlais Brook, which came through a culvert under the road and behind the slaughter-house, so it was very convenient, not only for the slaughter-house waste, but for other tradesmen also. I turned the meat in the sausage-machine forward into the skins James Thomas junior was holding over the nozzle of the machine. My arms were getting tired when I was told by one of the many jolly daughters that I was wanted in the shop, where I found a basket of meat awaiting delivery. Off out I went with it.

This was my first real job. Walking in the position of a leaning tower I travelled about with loads of meat so heavy as to almost dislocate my hips. When my hips grew sore I carried the load on my shoulders. Whilst on this job I learnt to know the outskirts of our town, the pleasant parts on the sides of hills, where the families who could afford to keep servants lived. I was more than a little surprised to find that there were people other than poverty-stricken colliers and steelworkers living on the outskirts of the town. Such people as lawyers, colliery agents, works managers, and brewers.

On my way back to the shop swinging my empty basket I thought of things I was going to do, the things I was going to be. If when passing the Drill Hall I saw the soldierly figure of David Rhys Lewis coming to meet me with sword at the trail, and in the full glory of the regimentals of the Merthyr Volunteers, it was a soldier I would be. If when passing a building in which Dan (bach) Davies's famous choir was being rehearsed for an eisteddfod or oratorio, it was a singer I would be. If when passing the circus on my way home late at night, it was a bareback rider or a trapeze artiste I would be. Oh, the things I was going to be, and going to do.

Then suddenly the circus packed up and went away. Now what can we do? During our period of mourning for the circus that had gone there was a double-wedding in the family—after which there was more room in our house. Our aunts

Saran and Liza got married and went to live in houses of their own. Part of the extra room after their departure was taken up by another new baby, who was named Dick after our auntie Lewis—mam's auntie, not ours—our new baby was named after her son who was killed in the Zulu War when serving in the 24th with our mam's brother Ike.

Shortly after the new baby came, dad came home from work one night and said to mam: "You'll be right now, then."

"What?" said mam.

"They're going to build a new theatre."

"Where?"

"Here, in Merthyr."

"Yes, but where in Merthyr?"

"There were Lawson's theatre used to be——"

"Not where the circus used to be?" said I.

"Shut up," said dad.

"Here's your taters an' meat," said mam.

He went on eating; I sneaked out to seek confirmation of the wonderful news, for I knew mam was as anxious for confirmation as I was. There had been nothing much in the way of plays since Lawson had left the town. Hermann Vezin had been once to the Temperance or the Drill Hall, and that was about the lot, so mam was—she said so—"dying to see a good play again".

I failed to get any confirmation that night, but it wasn't long before we did. Soon men were laying the foundation of the new theatre's pine-end in the Morlais Brook, within about a dozen yards of the house in which we had once lived. Mam and I stood watching the men working where once I had watched the rats play.

"What a pity we moved away from Tai-Harry-Blawd," I said.

"No pity," said mam.

"They won't be able to take this theatre away," said I.

"No; a woman in Jane Hall's shop told me that it'll be the biggest in Wales, costing I don't know how many thousands of pounds. The town is getting on now, new council, new threatre——"

"Are you taking us the night it opens, mam?"

"We'll see."

I watched that theatre going up and up, all too slowly for me. From all angles I noted the building operations. "No, they won't be able to pack that up and take it away," was the thought I hugged.



"Dorothy," a musical play, was, I believe, the first play mam took us all with her to the gallery of the new Theatre Royal and Opera House to witness. We were all with her in the front row of the gallery. She sat with the baby on her lap, and the rest of us three each side her. Right against the barrier separating the gallery from the three-shilling plush seats of the grand circle. Below that the pit and orchestra stalls. "No, they won't be able to take this theatre away, our mam."

"Shush, boy."

"Look," said Billa, "look at those men coming out of that hole down there."

"Shush, boy."

"I know, it's the band——"

"Be quiet, I tell you."

We sat quiet through the overture, and through what followed. Amazed and delighted—speechless. The baby slept in mother's arms through it all. Mam's eyes were shining as she looked down at the stage, and whilst looking around during the intervals. Once when I straightened up from where I had been leaning forward and stretching my neck as far as possible over the barrier, I caught her smiling down on us. We were the last to leave the gallery after the performance was over.

On the way home—riding our Ike on my back up the hill towards home—I said : "Our mam, do you know what I'm going to be when I grow up?"

"What?"

"An actor."

"Oh," was all she said.

For years after that wonderful first night the new Theatre Royal and Opera House filled my mind. It affected my school work ; my week-end work at the butcher's ; and my attendance at Sunday-school. In school during the week, instead of paying attention to what the teacher was saying, my mind and its eye was feasting on the picture posters of what was that week being presented at the theatre. Cane, cane, cane. The teacher caned until even she tired and sent me with a note to the master, dear old Mr. Oliver Evans, who, after he had read the note, would sigh as he took up his cane : "Whatever's the matter with you lately, Johnny?" I didn't know, neither did the master. "All right, hold your hand out." Swish. "Now the other." So it went on. My reading and writing and composition were passable, but as for arithmetic . . .

On Friday and Saturday evenings James Thomas would be saying : "Wherever have you been all this time, Johnny? You left this shop soon after six o'clock to deliver—what was it he had to deliver?" he would ask Miss Elizabeth, the daughter who served behind the counter and kept the books.

"Only the Plews and Harrap's orders."

"Well, well, well, and now it's half-past eight. You—— But take that basket of meat off the block and go as fast as you can up to Cefn. Wait till your mother comes in . . ."

I hurried out with the basket of meat our customers in Cefn would—some of them—have to wait up late for. The Cefn deliveries were not to my taste for the reason that after my basket was empty there was no theatre on the way back to stand gawping at, whereas my deliveries in the direction of the hospital enabled me to waste an hour or so in front of the theatre on the way back. I could, when pressed against one of the two double-doors between the two pay-boxes, hear the orchestra faintly, and sometimes the singers and actors on the stage. Though not able to see anything, my imagination took me inside to waste an hour of James Thomas's time.

On Sundays I competed with other boys for the honour of seeing a member of the departing company of players off—"carry your bag down to the station, sir?" Same when the incoming company of players arrived by train to find a band of us boys waiting on the platform. "Carry your bag, sir/miss/madam?" After a time the porters and the platform inspector and foreman regarded us as a nuisance to be kept off the arrival platform on Sundays. Then we waited, like a pack of dogs waiting for a sight of the rabbit, outside the station, where we were regarded as a nuisance by the cabbies on the rank. For they knew that if—weather permitting—one of us boys humped a player's heavy bag to his lodgings for threepence, the player who might otherwise take a cab would decide to walk to stretch his or her legs after the long train journey. So between the porters and the cabbies we boys had a hard time of it many a Sunday. If the actors' and actresses' time of departure or arrival happened to coincide with the time for Sunday-school, then we "mitched" from Sunday-school, which was always with us, as the saying is. Even when times of departure and arrival of players left us the time to sandwich the Sunday-school between, it was of the players and their plays we were thinking whilst the

Sunday-school teacher told us of the trials of Moses in the wilderness.

By hook or by crook we boys and our mam managed to get up into the gallery of that new Theatre Royal and Opera House at least once each week. Our dad never went there, preferring three pints for his sixpence. The time came when we, that is, me, our Billa, our Frank, and Dai Hughes, appeared on the stage for a week with a great London actor, who was also our mam's favourite actor. She said she could sit the week round watching Louis Calvert acting the lead in "Proof". But it wasn't in "Proof" us boys appeared with him, but in "Rip Van Winkle".

The great actor had evidently seen me ripping the heavy bag out of his stage manager's hand on the Sunday outside the railway station, just as he himself was about to step into a cab, for all actor-managers visiting our town took cabs, never walked from or to the railway station. I ripped the bag out of the hand of the man he was talking to as he stood with one foot on the step of the hansom, which, if I rightly remember, was Bill Thorney's hansom, the Bill Thorney who had a stable and coach-house in Castle Lane, and who had the name of being the smartest cabby outside of London.

"We shall require a few of those boys," said the actor-manager, whose hair was so thick behind.

"Yes, sir," said the man whose bag I was holding fast with my two hands, for other, bigger boys who hadn't managed to get hold of a bag and a player were waiting their chance to snatch it from me.

"See you later," said the actor-manager, as the cab he was in drove off.

"Yes, sir," said the man whose bag I was holding fast. I shouldered the bag and led my man up the street in the direction of the digs which the advance manager had booked for him. When he was handing me sixpence at the door of his digs he asked me if I knew three other boys who could be supers in the play starting the next evening.

"I know dozens of boys, sir."

"I only want four, four intelligent boys."

I assured him that the three boys which I would bring with me were most intelligent.

"We'll see," he murmured.

Our Frank, Billa and I, and Dai Hughes, appeared in three scenes with Louis Calvert in "Rip Van Winkle", in which we had to talk a bit as well as change into stage-clothes for the



second scene in which we appeared, when we were the little demons who made Rip drink himself to sleep for I don't know how many years up in the Catskill Mountains. We had cloaks to wear, and high and pointed hats, and we rolled little casks invitingly towards him as we made suggestive noises. In the first scene we were boys of the village, and we entered with Mr. Calvert as "Rip" riding our Frank on his back, all of us pretending to laugh, all except our Frank, who had his work cut out to stay on Mr. Calvert's back, owing to it being so broad. In the last scene we were village boys again, but it was not like the first scene, for now Mr. Calvert had long whiskers which made him too old to walk far, let alone ride our Frank on his back. In this scene we pointed and made fun of his whiskers. Sixpence a night apiece we got for acting with Mr. Calvert in this play; so we were a big help to our mam that week. But it was awkward on the Friday and Saturday night of that week for James Thomas the butcher. Our mam sent two instead of me. Our Ike and Blodwen, she assured James Thomas, the butcher, knew the places where the meat had to go, for she had shown them the places. But they were too small to carry what I used to carry. Anyway, he had to do the best he could with them for that week-end—and another week-end as well.

This time our Billa and Frank and I and Dai Hughes had to sing on the stage, sing carols, in the last act of a play in which the hero after having suffered wrongful imprisonment with exile to follow, returns, grey-haired by now, to the place he was born at, just as we were singing carols in front of the house in which he was born. Jack Hall and the other man who helped him to wind the rope that pulled up the curtains, were letting paper snow down from the flies as we sang. The long-suffering hero, his hat hanging from his left hand, stands alone to sob soundlessly into his right hand as our singing reminds him of those happy days of yore.

Having sung all we had been told to sing, I began to lead the way off—for I was carrying the lantern with a candle burning inside. Our Frank, who had been singing the way our dad did with his eyes shut, instead of following the rest of us off, drew a long breath whilst the hero opened his mouth to tell the audience what our young voices had done to him, and started singing again on his own. I went on and scragged him off, and the audience laughed when they shouldn't.

"I've a damned good mind not to pay you," the man who

had engaged us said. Then he laughed, rubbed our Frank's head and said : " You sang not wisely but too well," and handed us our pay, sixpence a night apiece. That was another good week for our mam. Sixpence a night we boy supers were paid, though we often had to do more, and say more than the men supers, who were paid a shilling a night just for standing on guard in a soldier's uniform. But it wasn't pay we thought of. If we had been offered a penny a week to appear we would have jumped to take it. For we were both stage-struck and theatre-struck—as the whole town was rapidly becoming. The new Theatre Royal and Opera House, which, with the improvements, had cost nearly ten thousand pounds, was attracting new patrons by the score from the ranks of those of whom it had been said that they " were drenched in either drink or Nonconformity ". The lessee, Mr. Smithson, whose daughter was on her way to musical comedy stardom, was making his pile in the town where, in old Sam Homfray's time, stage-players had wanted a night's shelter. Now they were being applauded, fêted—and well paid. Opera, Shakespeare, the drama in all its categories, old English and modern comedies of Oscar Wilde and others, farces from slapstick to bedroom, followed in turn, each having their own following, each making inroads on the narrowness of the outlook of different sections of the town's growing population.

The Theatre Royal and Opera House being such an improvement on what had previously existed in the sphere of entertainment, gave rise to a demand for certain other improvements. The old retaining bank of the walls of Penydarren Park was, from the drive of Penydarren House to below the Theatre Royal and Opera House, converted into a real promenade along which the townspeople could promenade under the trees of the Park.

Most nights, weather permitting, and when wanting the price of admission into what to me was heaven on earth, I stood on the promenade looking across at the gas-illuminated frontage of the Theatre. From time to time the furnaces of Cyfarthfa and Dowlais works added their share to the general illumination of the night. Some strange fascination held me there. When my eyes looked away from the theatre's frontage down the street the theatre of life was opened unto me. The gas-lit shops and public houses, the people moving along the pavements. The clop-clop of horses' hoofs on the metalled road ; light laughter floating up to me. Stars thick as anything in the sky above. The night so full with promise, rich

promise that almost made me cry—sometimes did make me cry for I knew not what.

A ragged and imaginative eleven-year-old boy crying on the promenade, under the sighing trees, facing the gas-illuminated frontage of a theatre.



## CHAPTER VIII

### TO MEET THE PRINCE

"THE Prince of Wales is coming to Cardiff next week," said Dai Hughes, one morning as we were on our way to school.

"Who said?"

"It's in the paper."

"Yes," said Ivor Davies, "I heard my father tell mother that some of the men working at Jenkins's are going down by train to see the Prince."

"Can anybody see him, then?" I asked.

"Of course, anybody who goes to Cardiff."

After thinking about this off and on throughout the day, I made a suggestion to Dai and Ivor that evening. "Let's walk to Cardiff down the canal bank to see the Prince."

Ivor, who was hoping soon to pass from St. David's to the Higher Grade school down the bottom of the town near the gas-works, said he wouldn't think of mitching from school to walk along the canal bank from Merthyr to Cardiff. Dai Hughes said he wouldn't mind. That night he and I arranged to meet earlier than usual the next morning, after having slipped out the back-way of the houses we lived in—he lived on the Tramroad—with whatever food we could get from the pantry without our mothers knowing.

When I met him on Jane Hall's corner next morning I could see he had no package of food under his coat.

"I'm not coming," he said.

"Why, you big baby—I've a mind to give you a dab in the eye."

"You try it—go on."

I couldn't very well start fighting with a half-loaf of bread and a lump of cheese under my coat—that he knew.

"Wait for Ivor an' we'll all go to school together," he said.

"I'm going to Cardiff to see the Prince same as I said—you go home an' ask your mother to put a napkin on you."

Off down the street I went, as far as the Castle Hotel, on the opposite side to which I stopped to think. Would I turn right to get to the canal bank? or go straight on to school? If to school, then Dai and Ivor would have a laugh. Tell the other boys about my having brought food from home, and then being afraid to do what I had said I would do. I turned right towards the canal.

In about five minutes I was standing on the left bank of what had been one of the engineering wonders of the last decade of the eighteenth century, since when, for a hundred years, it had been carrying the iron, coal and steel of our town and other towns and villages down to the sea at Cardiff, to go from there in ships to all parts of the world. Millions and millions of tons, millions and millions of poundsworth of what granseer and dad and the men of their and previous generations had toiled for.

There was a barge being lowered into the second of the many locks to be negotiated on the twenty-five mile journey to the sea-lock at Cardiff. I stood watching it go down into the lock. There was still time, if I ran all the way, to get to school. Beyond the lock about a hundred yards a boy of about my own age was standing in charge of the horse which he hitched to the rope of the barge as soon as it came out of the lock. I walked and talked with him until we reached the next lock. Too late for school now; and it was useless my keeping company with the barge-boy, for at every lock there was a leisurely pow-wow between the man in the lock-house and the bargee. Better push on. Hardly knowing what I was in for I hurried on in the hope of getting to Cardiff in time to see the Prince.

It was a lovely summer's day, and there were many novel sights to keep me from feeling despondent down to the half-way point at Pontypridd, where I ate the food I had been carrying to there. Now what shall I do? Time was going on, and I was beginning to feel tired. If I started back home then it would be goodness knows what time before I got there. There would be a row; the cane in school in the morning—and on top of it all I would not be able to say that I had been to Cardiff. May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

When resting near a place where the River Taff, the canal, and the railway line were next to next, and one forming a bank for the other, I remembered what granseer used to be telling me about the way the canal had the "swing" before the Taff Vale railway came to rob the canal after it had had

the "swing" for nearly fifty years. Granser was married the week the Taff Vale railway was opened all the way to Merthyr, I now remembered with much more of what he used to tell me. I was getting hungry again. Where was I? Near Nantgarw, a man told me. What time is it, please? Getting on for six o'clock.

It was after eight when I reached the outskirts of Cardiff, and by this time it was not of the Prince I was thinking. Only of myself. Half-starving. What'll I do? Knock—ask. Off the canal bank and across a field and out on to a road leading to some houses I went to ask for a drink of water, before starting to cry on the doorstep. The woman asked me in, and when in asked me questions. Her many children stood looking at me, and the woman's husband looked at her.

They left me with the children whilst they went into another room, from where the woman presently returned to the kitchen. "You wait here with us until my husband comes back," she said. "Have a bit to eat whilst waiting."

I was feeling quite at home when the man returned with a policeman. "Now, don't be frightened," he said.

"No need to be frightened," said the policeman.

"You go with him," said the man, pointing to the policeman.

"I'm not taking you to the police-station," said the policeman.

"No, not to the police-station," said the man.

"Here's your cap," said the woman.

"Come on, then," said the policeman.

It was pitch-dark by this time, so I don't know where we went, the way, I mean, but it was to some big house, to where there was a man sitting behind a table with papers on it. He said to another man: "See that he has a bath, get him some clothes and put him with the other boys."

Being too tired to cry long awake I fell to sleep. Next morning I dressed in clothes similar to those the other boys of the place were wearing. All the same clothes, and all with the same Glengarry caps on our heads. There was a man the boys didn't like—the man who had took me for a bath the night previous—ordering us about. We worked in a big garden with him watching us all day.

Two nights and one day I was there before the man the boys were so afraid of said: "Come with me, you." I followed him to the room where the man was sitting just where he had been sitting behind the table with papers on it when



the policeman brought me. Our dad was there as well, sitting on a chair, dressed in his best clothes. His bowler hat was on his knees, held by the rim with both hands.

"Is this him?" said the man behind the table.

"Yes," dad said, reaching for my hand, "this is my boy."

"If he was mine I'd give him something to remember this jaunt by," said the man seated at the table, who said to the man standing near the door: "Get him into his own clothes and bring him back here as soon as you can."

I went with the man to where my own clothes and boots were bundled and ticketed just like clothes in Seidle's pawnshop.

"Strip," the man said. As he collected the clothes I took off to make a bundle of them he said: "If you was a boy of mine I'd give you such a tanning— Come on, get into them rags of yours."

Rags or not they felt better than the clothes they had given me in that place. Dad was on his feet waiting when I got back to the room dressed in my own clothes. "Take him away," said the man behind the table.

"Yes, sir—and thank you for looking after him."

Down the drive and out through some gates on to the street with dad, who was pressing my hand. He stopped and said: "Did they give you plenty to eat in—in there?"

"Same as the other boys in there."

"H'm, I know. Never mind, your mother'll give you a stuffin' when we get home off the train. Come on, this is the way to the station, I think." On the platform of the railway station he pulled at the thin silver chain before he remembered that the watch he was going to look at had been pawned to get the money to come to Cardiff to fetch me home. In the compartment we sat quiet in opposite corners, dad with his bowler hat on his knees. The train rushed us back into the hill country. Only once did dad speak, and that was to point out to me the pit at Cilfynydd in which, two years previous, two hundred and seventy-six men and boys lost their lives when the pit exploded. "Two hundred and seventy-six," dad murmured. "An' they say we're getting too much money."

I pressed my face to the window so as to keep the fatal pit in sight as long as possible. A few more months and I would be starting work underground. From the Aberdare Junction we had the compartment to ourselves all the way

to Merthyr. Once back in Merthyr I expected dad would turn in some place for a pint, for he had not had a pint in Cardiff, and dad liked a pint of beer. But he took me straight home to mam, who said: "Well, my boy?"

"Give him something to eat," said dad.

There was taters an' meat for both of us, and there was a pint of beer in a quart bottle for dad to have with his taters an' meat. Half-way through the meal I burst out crying with my mouth full of food. "I'm sorry, our mam."

"Eat your food, my boy. Never mind crying. You're home, that's the main thing," said dad. "You'll soon be going to work with me in the Gellideg seam."

"Time enough to talk about that," mam said.

It didn't seem long before our mam met me one day as I was leaving school for the day, and took me to a shop to fit me into duck-cloth pit-trousers.

"Too long a bit," said mam.

"It's the smallest we've got. How old is he?" said the man of the shop.

"He'll be twelve on Monday," said mam. "Here you are—I'll make it fit," she said, as she handed the man the money for the trousers.

Finished with school, thank goodness, was what I thought. Let Ivor Davies go on to the Higher Grade school, and parade through town with a leather schoolbag on his back. I shall be a man, wearing long trousers, working in the pit with dad, sitting down to taters an' meat every night with dad, having pocket-money on Saturday nights same as dad, pocket-money to spend as I like. I can buy Cinderella cigarettes—ay, an' beer if I want it. On Mabon's Mondays, the monthly holiday, I would go about in long trousers with other working chaps, go to the Penydarren Park to see the racing cyclists in the afternoon, and to the theatre gallery at night—but not with our mam and the children now. With working chaps.

So I planned on the night of November 23rd, as I paraded the row with my long pit-trousers on. "Showing off, that's what," said the boys condemned to continue at school. Their mothers from their doorsteps laughed at me as I paraded, and one woman said: "Look at him, he's only a handful."

This I repeated when I went in to go to bed to have a good sleep. Dad laughed. "Only a handful, was that what she said? Then what if she had seen me going to the pit when I was only eight—and what if they had seen the six-year-olds of your gran's time being carried like babies

to the pits to mind doors in the dark for fourteen hours a day? ”

“Never mind what they said,” our mam murmured. “Off to bed now—you’ll have to be up before five, remember.”

Next morning I was pulling on my long duck-cloth pitman’s trousers as the hooters began hooting five o’clock. Then my new pitman’s boots that mam had bought for me at Oliver’s—new everything except waistcoat I had—well, new for me, though the coat and overcoat had once been our dad’s, but mam made ’em fit me. New food-box an’ tea-jack—though it was water some boys had to go to work. But our mam, especially in the winter, filled our jacks with boiling weak tea, which kept our hands warm as we carried it. Then there was my new naked-light lamp, and the ringed spike in which it would be put to stand underground.

“Come on,” dad snapped, as soon as we had finished breakfast.

“The hooter haven’t blown ha’past five yet,” mam said. “Let’s see if you’ve got everything.”

“Of course he’s got everything,” dad said.

“An’ have you got his stificate from the school? ”

“Yes—come on, son.”

The hooters with varying notes began hooting half-past five at us as we stepped out into the windy darkness. From the end of the row I looked back before turning the corner. Mam waved a good-bye from where she stood in the lighted doorway. Dad hadn’t looked back. He walked fast, with me trotting behind. Down the hill until we reached Tai-Harry-Blawd—where we used to live—then across the bridge over the brook now raging-drunk on autumn rain. Out on to the main street, into the tide of hurrying men and boys. Under the gas street-lamps many who are coal-blackened move wearily, they are the night-shift workers on their way home and to the beds which day-shift workers have not long left.

Thousands of day-shift workers hurrying. Colliers—steel-workers. One stream hurrying downhill to Cyfarthfa Works and pits and levels and drifts, and to the Plymouth pits, levels and drifts as well. The other stream breasting a way uphill to Dowlais Works and pits and levels and drifts. A sprinkling of women to their work on pit-heads and brickyards, hurrying. Heavy-shod feet harmonizing. Voices. Hullo, Shoni. Hullo, Dai. Pass. Angry, reddish furnace glow coming to the assistance of the gas street-lamps to hurry us on to our



work. The furnaces first throw their glow into our faces, then up into the sky to mellow. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Must keep close to dad's heels. The public-houses are all open, I notice, and their lighted interiors invite many to dodge in for a livener, in the case of the day-shift workers, and a pint to wash the dust down in the case of the night-shift. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Thousands—tramp.

On Pontmorlais Square the human streams fork, towards me, and from me. To the right for the Cyfarthfa Works and the colliers' trains for the Cyfarthfa Pits ; straight on, please, for the colliers' trains to the Plymouth Pits—if you prefer walking straight on—but hurry, please, say the hooters. From Merthyr making for Dowlais ; from Penydarren and Dowlais making for Merthyr. Tramp, tramp, tramp.

Colliers' trains, having discharged their cargoes of night-shift workers, are now waiting impatiently at the three points of the triangle within which the district stands. Trains waiting impatiently for day-shift workers. Hurry, please. Waiting to be dangerously overloaded with day-shift workers. Hurry them up, hooters, for they have to be conveyed to the pits, shot down the pits, and hurried forward to their underground working-places before they start hewing the "Best Welsh" coal for which the world is waiting. Hurry, please.

Dad is a walker, one who prefers walking—even through the rain—all the way to the pit to riding in or on the dangerously overloaded colliers' trains. "Worse than the black hole of Calcutta" was what he said. Made his weak chest cough, the smoke from all the pipes did ; made his weak stomach heave, all the smoke from the pipes and the gobbing did. So let's walk. I trotted behind. Saw collier's train, with youngsters hanging like flies outside overcrowded carriages. Even riding on buffers and jammed into open trucks. "An' that's nothing like what it is in the summer," says dad, "an' that's why I always walk—an' if you're wise you'll always walk too."

What hooter's that ? Six o'clock. Hurry, please, it hoots. At the pit-head my dad hands my leaving certificate to a man in the little office, then turns about to join the queue moving forward to the pit-cages. He lights his naked-light lamp from another's man's, but tells me I needn't bother to light mine until we reach the pit-bottom. The bottom. He shepherds me on to the cage in front of him, and I grab the handrail and hold my breath as the cage rises off its rests,

which are held clear to allow the cage to hurl itself down the pit. My inside felt inclined to hurry out of my mouth up into the disappearing sky, and I trembled until I felt a protective and quite reassuring hand close over mine as it nervously grasped the handrail. My dad—bump. It was the bottom. Dad shepherds me off.

What a place. Huge kettle-shaped oil-flares seemed to be pouring out light—and yet the place was dark to me. I stumbled, but the hand was there. "Steady, son." My dad. Forward between lines of trams, loaded trams waiting to be sent up into the world, empty trams waiting to be taken forward into the workings. "Shall I light my lamp now, dad?" "In a minute. Sit here till your eyes get used to it." Sitting beside my dad, with my naked-light lamp lit now. Gradually my eyes conquer the gloom. Dad shows me how to keep the flame of my lamp clear by touching and raising the wick with my ringed spoke.

Horses, one following the other, emerge from what looks like a crack in the wall about twenty yards distant. Huge, the horses looked, and behind each horse a man who grasped the horse's tail. The men sang, shouted, whistled—and swore. "Coming out of the stables," said Dad. "Come on, let's go in front of them." On into the workings of the underground world. We halted when we came to where there were many men and boys seated waiting for something. Dad sat and motioned me to a place at his side. "We got to stay here till the fireman that's been rounding the work comes to tell us if it's all right for us to go to our work," dad explained. Other men and boys joined us. We must be about a hundred in all.

In the other parts of the pit, and in all the districts of the many other pits, workers waiting for the right-away. Thousands. Now I was one of them. Men were talking one to the other and laughing. Even the boys were talking one to the other in undertones. "Remember, boys should be seen an' not heard," was what dad had said. So I was seen and noticed by some of the men. "Is he your oldest, Dai?" "Yes." "Not very big, is he?" "Big enough." "You're right, plenty big enough for this seam," laughed the man. Many of the men were smoking their pipes, but dad chewed his 'bacco. Many of the boys were also chewing 'bacco. Then a man came hurrying to where we were all seated. "Right," he said. Dad rose and said: "Come on."

All on the move. Up a rise I followed dad until we got

to a hole in the side of the road, into which dad turned, and where he stopped and began to undress. "This is my stall," he said. "Give me your spike." I handed him my ringed spike, which he drove into a wooden post, and in which he placed my naked-light lamp to rest. "Strip," he said. After having stripped ready for work and rolled my shirt-sleeves up I looked up at dad, who smiled down on me and said: "Yes, you'll do." Then he spat the 'bacco out of his mouth, took some fresh out of his 'bacco-box and put it into his mouth, and with his lamp in his hand went forward to where there was about two feet of coal sandwiched between two-foot layers of rock top and bottom. "This is it," he said, taking a mandril with which he crawled on his stomach towards the coal. He tapped the rock-roof with the mandril, listening carefully to the sound. Along the length of his working-place—about twenty yards from end to end—he crawled tapping the rock-roof before he lay resting on his elbow, smiling towards where I was waiting instructions. "Yes, the top's all right. Get your lamp, son, then come on here for dad to show you the coal the British Navy likes best."

This was a dad I had not known before, a jolly, protective, and kindly dad. With my lamp in my hand I crawled forward under the rock-roof to where he lay on his side.

"There it is, Johnny. That's what we've got to get from where it's grown into that empty tram. Three shilling a ton large-coal, Johnny—we gives the bosses the small-coal for nothing to help them to keep their families out of the work-house." He laughed.

"The coal is not the same here, dad, as it is in the trucks in front of Tai-Harry-Blawd."

He laughed. "Not by a long shot. Here we've got to lie on our sides between the rock top an' bottom to beat it from there—ay, an' often to blow it from there with powder."

"Is it all like this then?"

"No, no. In some places the coal is so thick they've got to get on ladders an' on to staging to beat it. In some parts of the nine-feet seam the coal is more'n thirteen feet thick. Here it's not two feet." He went on to speak of the Bute Seam, the six- and four-feet seams, for a couple of minutes before he began hitting at the coal in front of him. "What shall I do, dad?"

I was eager to help, eager to start performing in that vast underground arena where thousands like dad and I were



beginning the day's battle for bread. "You'll soon have enough to do," said dad.

Twelve hours later we were on our way home. When we got into the main street dad said: "I'm going into the Express to drink a pint before going home. You hurry on." But all the hurry had been taken out of me by then.

## CHAPTER IX

### OH, THAT DIAMOND JUBILEE

THINGS were easier with us now that dad and I were working in the pit, and our Billa working at Thomas the butcher's. Mam had cleared the bedding account, so there was no longer any danger of the beds being taken from under us. It was hard work for me and dad to keep up sides with two big men in the pit, but we did it by working most Friday nights to rip or blast our roof and bottom, and stow it. In order that we, as man and boy, should each week fill as much coal as any two grown men working together in the Gellideg seam, we had to work a week-end "trebler", which is a treble shift without rest from Friday morning to Saturday afternoon. "Got to, to earn our salt," dad said.

He wanted five full and long working-days hewing and filling the coal for which we got three shillings per ton—for large-coal only, for the few tons of small-coal we filled out each week was what dad called "pocket-money for the bosses' wives an' children". If me and dad filled coal from Monday morning first thing till the end of Friday's shift we could put from fifteen to twenty tons a week to our credit in the office—for dad filled a lovely tram of coal. Built it up like a house to travel from our working-place back to the pit. Then when each man's weight would appear on the list in the window of the weighing-machine, dad's good filling of his trams could be seen by all who scanned the list. So many tons of large—for which we were to be paid the pay-day following; and a few tons of small that had gone through the screen to fill the pockets of the bosses, but not ours. Anyway, if we could have five days a week "on the coal", hewing and filling coal, and not ripping or blasting roof or bottom, we were all right.

But that left us only the Saturday, a short shift that ended at two o'clock, to rip or blast and stow about two yards of roof and bottom so as our tram could be close up to the coal to start filling first thing Monday morning again. Couldn't

be done on the Saturday, but it could on the Friday night and Saturday—and we could put a pair of two-yard rails down to get our tram block to the coal as well. The nearer the tram to the coal, the quicker it could be filled with coal. Keep the tram well on to the coal was dad's motto. So we didn't use to go home at the end of Friday's shift, but stayed in to rip or blast our rock-roof and bottom, for which we got nothing, for it was work included in the price of the ton of coal.

Dad said that the loss of Friday night's rest could be made up on the Sunday. So we worked Friday, Friday night and Saturday most weeks. It had to be done if we wanted to keep up sides with the working-places worked by two grown men. More, we were eleven in all, nine children and dad and mam, to live on what me an' dad earned—for the shilling and pound of sausage Billa earned was neither here nor there.

Our rock-roof and bottom was too hard to rip with mandril or sledge and wedge, so each Monday I got a note for powder from the office at the pit-head, and fuse as well, which I carried in our own powder-box from the company's powder-house. Dad kept the powder upstairs under the bed, and the fuse in the oven the night before he was going to use it, so as to be sure it would be dry and that we should not have a "flat-shot", a shot that did not go off owing to the fuse being damp or something. For if we had a "flat-shot" our working-place was crossed off as "DANGEROUS", and we were not allowed to go into it for twenty-four hours to bore out the defective fuse and powder. Some men when they had a "flat-shot" didn't report it for fear of losing the shift's work. They bored it out almost immediately, and sometimes whilst boring it out before allowing time for the fuse to quite die, the smouldering fuse which was dying was stirred into life and went on to the powder which went off and blew off men's heads, blinded or disfigured them. There were lots of men of our district who had been burnt and disfigured in that way. They could not afford to wait twenty-four hours. Neither could our dad always; but when he went on to bore out a "flat-shot" in rock-roof or bottom, or in coal, he went on alone, telling me to stay back on the road-parting in case anything did happen. Nothing did ever happen to our dad, thank goodness.

After working a three-shift "trebler" without a break, stowing broken rock-roof and bottom in the emptiness from where we had worked the coal, I used to sleep from the time I went to bed Saturday night until Sunday tea-time, when I had



dinner and tea in one. So did dad, but he had beer instead of tea with his food at tea-time on Sunday. Mam used to feed us both well, and we went to work on the Monday morning feeling not much the worse.

Stowing rock-roof and bottom in a crack barely two-feet thick is heavy and tricky work. For the smallest of it we used short-handled shovels, the biggest we stowed by hand, pushing it about ten yards to each side of the roadway, to the limits of our working-place. Our dad always took the heaviest end. Oh, the way he buckled into it. His long first throw from the roadway sent it a half-dozen yards to where I was crouched with short-handled shovel. "How's it coming up, son?" "Fine, dad." What a man!

Then during the five days we were "on the coal", hewing and filling coal from first thing Monday morning to the end of Friday's shift. He dressed and loosened the coal and pushed it behind him for me to load coal-boxes which I dragged back to unload into the tram in the roadway. At it a mile a minute. "How's it going, son?" "All right, dad." Where most men would bore a hole in coal and blow it from there with powder he would dress and coax and beat it from there. Clean the tops of back-slips, the butts of face-slips—"must give it every chance to work itself a bit, Johnny". "Yes, dad." What a man! Equally good with all the tools of his calling. Mandrils, heavy and light. Coal-box and shovel; sledge and wedge; hammer and drill; boring machines—and the way he built his tram of coal to travel the long distance along which it was so shaken back to the pit-bottom. Like black granite and well-built little houses his loaded trams of coal were. It was a privilege for me to number with chalk such works of art.

So we were busy at it, dad and I, as the Jubilee was being got ready for in our town and district. We, as a family, were getting on, no doubt about that—and so was our town. New Public Offices; and at last new houses being built in a way as pleased Dr. Dyke, our medical officer of health—but there were not enough being built to please "Dan Thomas, the Plymouth Arms", which was a free house. Dan, the licensee of the Plymouth Arms, had an awful nose—but not by drinking—well, not altogether. Some said it was drink, others said it was chronic indigestion, but whatever it was he was one of our town's most progressive councillors—no doubt about that. Houses for the people was his cry, this for the people, that for the people. Knew what he was talking about, for he could

remember the time, before the river wall was built to stop it, when the River Taff used to flood Bridge Street and Cae-draw up to the upstairs rooms. So he wanted more and better houses, more and better everything.

Now that the Diamond Jubilee was coming some building club had decided to commemorate it by building a number of fine houses up the hill from the new Hospital, "Lovers' Lane", as we called it then, but as people grew more refined and educated it became known as "The Walk", or "Gwaelodygarth", or something like that. For we were becoming more educated now that the new County Secondary School was in its second year. Before that was opened there was only the old Higher Grade down by the gas-works, and a few private schools for those who could afford 'em. Now we had this new County Secondary School ; new Public Offices ; new houses which had been built and those in course of erection, houses far enough from the stink of the River Taff and the Morlais Brook and the dirt of the works. These houses were beyond the means of colliers and steelworkers—but they were a start in the right direction, the beginning of what would end in families such as ours having a tidy house situated in a pleasant place. Mam was beginning to talk about a house with a front-room and a bath, but dad said he was satisfied to go on washing hisself all over in the tub before the fire same as he always had.

"But you're not everybody," mam told him. "'Leven of us on the one floor. You've been talking about building a bit of a kitchen out the back——"

"So I will some day."

"Some day."

"Oh, hell, shut up."

"I'll shut up ; but as soon as ever I can manage it I'm movin' out o' here into a better house, a house where there's a bit of a front-room which I'll be able to keep different from the high road ; an' a bathroom in which you an' the boys can wash all over tidy an' out o' sight."

"Getting too damned particular," dad told her.

All of us except dad were still regular patrons of the new Theatre Royal and Opera House, which was doing better business than ever. The man who at first had leased it from the company that had built it was now sole proprietor. Will Smithson was a good business man, but a painful actor. He engaged splendid companies, and so built up the reputation of the house, only to almost ruin it with his own family presenta-

tion of "Muldoon's Picnic", in which he took the leading part, a part he could not play. He was so bad that after the first night the audience, for the other performances, shouted: "The bricks fell down," from the time he appeared until he disappeared. His wife and his daughter Florrie were allowed to speak their pieces, for they knew how to make the best of the worst. Anyway, Will Smithson was making his pile, the people said.

Our choirs were also doing well about Jubilee time. Dan (bach) Davies's choir had up to then won about three thousand pounds in prizes; and young Harry Evans was beginning to make his mark as a conductor of the new school. There was also talk of a new accident ward for the new hospital, the "Diamond Jubilee Accident Ward", something to remember the Jubilee by, something which was to be the last word in accident wards. The Socialists who were beginning to rise their heads about Jubilee year talked a lot about this, and went into figures. Compared what those whom they called "exploiters" had made with what had—"for shame's sake", they said—been spent on the hospital.

"Comrades," they shouted, "in eighteen-hundred and ninety-seven you're to have an accident ward. From the middle of last century they've been mangling and killing you in this, the richest industrial area of the world. Until quite recently there wasn't a stretcher or an ambulance to convey you from where you were smashed to where you were left to die, comrades. At a time when there were upwards of twenty thousand workers in this district, a time when the percentage of mangled and killed was the highest in Britain, the bodies of the workers were being sent home on doors—no, not home, for your hovels were not worthy to be called homes. No place where you could get attention. Why? Was it because there was no money? Listen, comrades . . ."

Then they would go on to recite how many millions the Guests, the Crawshays, the Homfrays and many others had, so they said, taken out of the Merthyr district. "Out of your blood and sweat, comrades, out of the suffering of your women and children." Starting with Anthony Bacon in the middle of the eighteenth century they worked on through all the exploiters, as they called 'em, right up to Jubilee year. "Jubilee," they shouted cynically. "Whose Jubilee, comrades? Never mind, the great Crawshay left you his blessing—and the Cyfarthfa Band. Reminds me, that band of Crawshay's does, of the band Doctor Sequah, the painless tooth-extractor, used



to take around with him. When he was extracting the band played so as the cries of the victim could not be heard. Crawshay left you Merthyr people a band—but he took the eight million sterling away with him. Then the Guests . . .”

These Socialists were most of them, so the papers said, “agitators from other parts. Men whose rantings were not worth a moment’s consideration. Men who had been discredited in their place of origin, and who now were trying to mislead the people of Merthyr. . . .” A large number of those who, evidently, were either unable to read the warnings printed in papers, or didn’t trouble to read the papers, stood to listen to the Socialist speakers.

But most people went on decorating in readiness for the Jubilee. Our town was decorated as never before, and on Jubilee night, the new Public Offices, which hadn’t been up long, were a sight. The gas illuminations of our new Public Offices were the talk of the district. Six thousand of our town’s children had a tea-party in Penydarren Park—and seven of those children were our mam’s. I didn’t go for the reason that I was working in the pit with dad, but I had a grand time all the same.

After it was all over dad and I went on working in the Gellideg seam in Cwm Pit for the contractors who paid their men in pubs. The contractors were not bad chaps, but they were part of a rotten system. In order to get the “forcing” done efficiently the colliery companies surrendered control of underground areas to these contractors. The contractors engaged the men and boys, then went around looking wild and shouting : “Coal, coal, coal, we want coal !” They were paid so much per ton by the company, about a shilling a ton more than they, the contractors, paid the men working for them—and the company. These contractors were most of them nigger-drivers who were related to the overmen and mine-managers. For a week’s forcing they would get a fistful of golden sovereigns ; dad and I for a seven-shift week about three golden sovereigns between us. So no wonder men were growing dissatisfied.

In the pit there was by the end of Jubilee year a lot of talk about “making a stand.” Dad didn’t talk much, but he joined the union, and made me a member. I used to take the union cards and the money to where we paid our union dues in the long room of the Prince of Wales public-house in Nantygwyneth Street, Georgetown.

The men were talking about “making a stand” one day

whilst waiting for empty trams in the pit. We had all been waiting hours for trams, and wondering what was the matter. Then one of the contractors who had been back to the pit-bottom to see what was the matter returned to tell us that something in the pit was broken, and that we would all have to find our way to the surface as best we could by way of the old return that would bring us out in Glyndyrus Wood, near the deep Glyndyrus Pond. "I don't know what the state of the return is," he said. "But it's either that or stay down here all night doing nothing."

So we all dressed, and dad whistled our Skye terrier bitch, whose name was Gyp, like all the others. We turned off the main underground roadway into some old workings, where in the old days the old-timers had worked coal on the pillar and stall system, not "long-face" as we worked it. The old workings were in a bad state, and so was the return we had to travel to get to the surface now that the breakage of the guides or something in the pit-shaft made it impossible for us to get to the surface in the pit-cage.

Dad went confidently forward into the old workings, in which the almost rotten timber had grown whiskers of a sort of pit-moss—or is it called fungus? Anyway, the upright timbers along the footway were covered with it, and it made them look like shrouded sentries on guard. There was running water under our feet which had been dyed red either by the ironstone or some other dye in the rock of the roof. The background of continuous, but not loud, sound of the earth's unrest was punctuated by the snap of rotten timber, fall of stones, and droppings of water. There were also a faint whistling sound of straying air-currents, some of which were foul-smelling. In this decayed air the flames of our naked-light lamps weakened.

To scramble over falls of roof we had to fix our lamps in loops which most of us had sewn on the pokes of our caps. The lamp carried on our foreheads left us with both hands free to negotiate the difficult and dangerous passage over the many falls of roof, some of which were mountainous, and left only room for one to crawl over at a time. One false move would most likely start the roof above and bring another fall down to bury the crawler and those nearest him.

"Careful, son," said dad, as he waited for me to come through the hole he had first crawled through. One fall of roof after another safely negotiated. Then we arrived at an expanse of water about the length of Pontyfyn Pond in the world above.

The lamps we carried could not show us the far end of the expanse of water, which looked menacing to me. "The swamp the old men used to talk about," dad, who was in front with other men and boys behind, murmured. "It's not too deep on the high right side." He fixed his lamp with which he had been viewing the water in the loop of his cap again. Then he tutted down. "Get on my back, son, and hold tight. Don't be frightened, and whatever you do—even if I stumble—don't put out your hand to touch the side-timbers. Hold fast round my neck."

I did, and dad waded into the water with me on his back, and our Skye Terrier bitch swimming in front. When the water was up above dad's middle I did get a bit frightened and my naked-light lamp fell into the water. "My lamp." "Never mind the lamp now, son, you hold fast round dad's neck," dad said in a way as calmed me.

Slowly he won his way through the expanse of ancient water, which at its deepest point, on the high right side along which our dad and the other men with boys on their backs travelled, was up to about our dad's chest. After they were all across safely, dad started up a steep incline. "Shan't be long now," he said. After we had climbed for some time he stopped, knelt, and pointed. "Look, son." There was what seemed to me to be a bright disc, about the size of a florin, on top of what appeared to be a distant mountain. "That's what we've been looking for, son, the light of the world, the world where your mam is. Come on." The disc of light grew in size as we climbed our way to the world's surface.

The damage to the pit-shaft was repaired in time for us to go down in the pit-cage next morning ; but there was another sort of damage brewing which stopped us going down the pit for many a bright day, for six months of bright days, for the weather was grand all the time we were on strike. Started just when our mam was getting our Billa ready to accompany dad and me to the pit. She had actually bought him his long duck-cloth pitman's trousers ; and had arranged for our Frank to take his place at Thomas the butcher's.

"But now that there's no work to be in the pit," she said to Billa, "you may as well keep on with James Thomas the butcher." He did, and if ever a shilling and a pound of sausage a week came as a big help it was during the six months we were on strike in '98. Mam said : "Just when we were getting on so well." She had had her eye on one of the new houses with a bath that were being built, houses with a



front-room in which a woman could sit for a bit looking at her best things on a Sunday afternoon.

"Pity, pity," people in the town said. "Just when everything was going so well"—for the town, they meant. For we had the new Public Offices with a clock-tower; and we were on the point of having electric trams and light and other things. Now that we miners were on strike it was doubtful if the town would have electric trams and light and the other things. But after we went back to work construction of the tramline commenced, and the papers said that we could now look forward with confidence to a long and prosperous era of peace and goodwill. But that was after the settlement.

For a time it was grand, I thought, to be on strike, sitting and standing about in the glorious weather listening to Mabon, M.P., Dai o'r Nant, C. B. Stanton and other of our leaders making speeches. Not that we boys listened attentively to what was said, but when the chairman said: "All in favour please show in the usual way," our hands went up with the men's. Having voted, we boys went off in gangs to enjoy ourselves. To the fields where the pit-horses were beside themselves with joy. We trapped them in the corners of the field and rode them bareback until we were thrown. Swimming; playing cards for matches on the Twmp. At night sneaking into the theatre. We gave each other leg-ups to mount either the top or bottom double-doors leading, not into the interior of the theatre, but to the next places to it. Once over the double-door and in the theatre yard it was every boy for himself. Crouch hidden in the urinal until the interval, when men patronizing the pit-bar would stroll out to the urinal to find one or two of us boys buttoning-up as we passed him to try and pass through the pit-bar into the pit. That was one of the many sneaking-in methods we adopted. Sometimes we were caught by either the proprietor or his father or the resident stage-manager, and then we paid with interest for the evenings on which we had been successful.

So it was a case of happy days and exciting nights for the first month or six weeks. It was most thrilling to sit witnessing a play or opera whilst feeling that each moment might be the last, the last before being spotted by old dad Smithson, the proprietor's dad, who scruffed us out to the entrance by the neck, then booted us down the steps. Nights when we could not sneak into the theatre we congregated to sing the nights away under the trees of Penydarren Park, not far from the theatre, out of sight of which we could not bear to be. During

the sunny days I learnt one card-game after the other. "All Fours" and "Banker" and "Nap" and other games I learnt too well for my good.

The time was bound to come when even we boys had to realize that there were no wages—no anything beyond the bit dad and I got in return for a day a week stone-breaking for the council, which was compelled by the action of the owners to deny us even that bit of relief work before the stoppage ended. Anyway, dad and I had it for a time. Then there was Billa's shilling and pound of sausage on Saturday nights; and him and me and dad went early in the mornings to scrat a couple of bags of coal from distant slag-tips. Most of this coal mam was sales-agent for, she "found place" for it before we had scrat it even. Shop-John; Evans the bakehouse; or Thomas the butcher gave her a little meat, butter or bread in exchange for the couple of bags of coal it had taken dad and Billa and me about a half-day to scrat and carry.

Had we been a small family, these shifts might have sufficed to bring us through without begging. But we were either ten or eleven in all—eleven, I believe—who had to try to live on next to nothing. So mam talked to dad, who, like myself, only went home for meals and to sleep. At first I was inclined to agree with dad in the discussion on ways and means of carrying on, discussions which sometimes ended in quarrels. "We've got to do something," our mam said.

"But not *that*," dad said.

"Why not. The Lord and his disciples begged their——"

"Don't bring the Lord into it, woman."

"Then we must starve, must we?"

"We won't starve—though I'd rather starve than you should go from door to door begging and selling strike ballads. Let the children go to the soup-kitchen in the Drill Hall, and——"

"But they begs the money to keep the soup-kitchen going."

"Woman, you're enough to drive a man to drink."

"It's eating, not drinking, that I'm worrying about. These children are every one eating like horses; and I've had all I'm likely to have on old account. It's no good you bother, Dai, for face it I'll have to, an' you must put up with it—high-stomached though you are. There's people working and earning good wages in the steelworks of every valley from here to Blaenavon. Me an' a couple of the boys can go out a couple of days a week to see what we can beg from 'em."

Dad was wild. "An' I'll stay home to look after the house, I suppose?"

"Blodwen can see to everything till I get back ; you can go an' scrat a bag of coal up the tip to sell for a bit of meat."

"Humph, from door to door—*begging*."

"I'm not asking you to do it, Dai."

"Neither am I asking you to do it, woman."

"All these children's bellies are asking me to do something. What do you know ? You're out of the house most of the time, but I'm here with 'em from morning to night, an' it's to me they turns for everything, it's to me they run for a cut off the loaf—an' it's me that's settling the matter, Dai."

She did. Next morning very early mam and Billa and I started off on the first begging expedition. Passing through Dowlais, which mam said had been worked till it was no longer any good by people who couldn't or wouldn't go further afield to beg, we climbed up to Dowlais Top, then from there descended into the Monmouthshire valleys. Mam carried what she called a "flask", which other people might call a large laundry-basket. Billa and I had supplies of "ballads", as the song-sheets pleading for justice for the miners were called. The song-sheets mam got on credit terms. "Thruppence a dozen to sell again," the wholesaler said. Mam said : "Right, give the boys a couple of dozen apiece—pay you when we come for the next lot."

So, mam with her big empty basket ; Billa and I with our stock of "ballads", it was over the hills and far away, to beg and to sell. Mam was the sort of beggar who made people feel it was a privilege to be allowed to help her, for she didn't what might be called "beg". Just said the truth to whoever answered her knock, stood smiling and looking at the people with those beautiful eyes of hers. Then she was so handsome ; people wouldn't believe that she was the mother of all us children. "Indeed I am ; these are my two eldest boys."

We were invited in to have food with families, the heads of which hunted up little worse than new clothes and boots that would do for Billa or me or some of the others at home. We did well that first day. Sold all our "ballads", and mam climbed the mountain towards home with the big basket filled with good food balanced on her head. Billa and I behind with parcels of clothes and boots. Dad was surprised, but he was not what you can call thankful.

Twice a week we went over the mountains with our mam, leaving our Blodwen to look after the house and tend to the other children. After we had sold our "ballads", we gave the money to mam, who knotted it inside a handkerchief which



she pinned inside the pocket of her skirt. One day, instead of running to mam with my ballad-money, I stopped to watch some youngsters gambling for money in the gully between the backs of the two rows of houses Billa and I had been working through. "Banker", the youngsters were playing, and there was big silver as well as coppers on the cards.

"Come on, our Johnny," Billa whispered. "Our mam said she'd be waiting on the Square for us."

"Wait a minute." I fingered the one shilling, one sixpence, and three pennies in my pocket. If I happened to be lucky it would be more than twice that I could give our mam. I chanced first one of the pennies. Lost. "Come on, our Johnny." Double-up and you're bound to win, was what I had heard somewhere. Two pennies on that corner card. Lost. "Our Johnny, I'll tell our mam." I pushed him away before bending over to place sixpence on the card the banker had placed back upwards in the same place. Bound to win this time. Lost. Where was Billa? Gone to tell our mam, I expect. Only the silver shilling left. Here goes—and if I win I'll take it straight to our mam, take the two shillings to our mam. Breathlessly I waited for the banker to turn my card face upwards. Lost. All—all gone—the ballad-money gone. That chap's got it. He's working in the steelworks—got plenty of money. I wonder if I explained to him, told him that our mam——

"Johnny, come here to me."

It was her, with the basket balanced on her head. Billa standing beside her—pointing. The gambling-school broke up, broke into ones and twos that disappeared into the backways of the houses.

"What have you done with the ballad-money, John?"

"Them boys just gone into their houses got it, mam," said Billa.

I couldn't speak, couldn't see for the bitter tears. "A nice trick," mam murmured, as she turned about. "Come on, we'll go home."

Through the street of the town, past the steelworks and out of town to the foot of the mountain. Up the mountain-path in single-file, mam leading, the loaded basket balanced on her head, Billa next, me last, swallowing hard, looking up at the basket which was so securely balanced on her lovely head of hair. Between the lovely hair of her head and the loaded basket there was a rolled towel. On that the basket rested. "A nice trick," was what she had said. It was

enough—more than enough to pierce me to the heart. Our mam. I remembered the time when she had taken us all with her to Zoar Chapel one Sunday evening, the Sunday evening John Thomas had preached about the one who had cried : “ . . . and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” I wasn’t, either. “ A nice trick.” Blodwen and all the others at home depending on us—on *me*. “ A nice trick,” was what the birds in the sky, and the summer breeze seemed to me to be saying.

On top of the mountain mam stooped down for Billa and me to lift the basket off her head. This was our half-way halt, from where we could see our home far below. Here, about eleven hundred feet above the sea-level at Cardiff, was where we used to count our blessings on the days we went out begging with mam. We would sit talking and laughing as we tried to pick out places in our Town. The Theatre ; Drill Hall ; Temperance Hall ; the Hospital ; Penydarren Park ; the new Recreation Ground and bandstand—“ and there’s our house.”

To-day there was no talking or laughing. After we had sat silent for about a minute she said : “ Don’t cry any more. I shan’t say a word to your father or anybody—an’ mind you don’t say a word, either, Billa. So stop crying, there’s a good boy.” She sat up, but remained in a stooping position until we had lifted the basket back into its place on her head. Then she started down into Dowlais, her arms moving freely, for she could carry baskets on her head without putting a hand to them.

The stoppage dragged on month after month, and bitterness was on the increase. One of our leaders, Dai o’r Nant, who was an Alderman of the county, was summoned for leading a demonstration or something. Riotous assembly, or something of the sort. Anyway, it was what he got six months in jail for, and that six months in jail was the death of Dai o’r Nant, for he didn’t live long after that. There were all sorts of meetings, and more of them as the bitter days went by one after the other. One of the strongest of the colliery companies threatened the council with the law if they continued giving us a little help to live, made the council close the stone-yards. Our own Mabon, M.P., was booed at more than one meeting by those who said he was not firm enough. Conferences were held at Cardiff most weeks during the latter half of the six-month stoppage.

During that latter half of the stoppage a man appeared in the Merthyr district. He had a beard same as our Mabon,

M.P., but he was not so jolly as Mabon. Neither could he speak Welsh like Mabon. He spoke Scotch-English in a way that impressed thousands of Welsh-speaking miners. The man had been a miner himself, in Lanarkshire in Scotland, and now he was a talker and organizer after being driven out by the bosses of his own country. When he talked to us in the Merthyr district during the latter half of the six-month stoppage, he never told any funny stories. Rarely smiled. But his talk put us in different places to where the bosses were living—almost put us apart from our own jollier Welsh miners' leaders. His sighs were scalding sighs that left the bosses as ready for scraping as a pig after being scalded. Having sighed, he talked—talked, but never shouted. Spoke of the women's deputation to the council to appeal for this and that. "Why have your women got to appeal, comrades?"

"*Comrades.*" From his mouth that word fell charged with pity. At once he made closer contact with his audiences of Welsh-speaking miners than ever their own Welsh-speaking leaders had made. Twice, when only a boy of fourteen, did I hear him speak during the latter half of that six-month stoppage. Yet it seemed to me then that every word he spoke about the workers and their sufferings and struggles came from a bleeding heart, a heart that had always bled, would always bleed for the suffering of mankind. Keir Hardie had grounded his anchor at Merthyr, and Merthyr was to be the better for it.



## CHAPTER X

### NIGHT-SCHOOL

"**T**HANK God for that," our mam said sincerely, when dad told her that a settlement had been arrived at at long last. Immediately she began to outline her debt-redemption plan. With Billa and me and dad working in the pit, and Frank in Billa's place at Thomas the butcher's, she was going to pay two weeks' rent each Saturday, the current week, and one week off "the old", of which there was six months owing. "Then we're all as good as naked, an' without a decent shoe to our foot. Must get a thing at a time."

There were scores of things wanted, so dad and us two eldest boys slogged away in Cwm Pit. Billa went to work with dad; I was transferred to one of dad's fellow-workmen, Dai Davies by name, but he was better known as "Dai Het."

"Is he a good boy, Davie?" asked Dai Het.

"My Johnny's nearly as good a man as I am," was dad's reply.

It was our dad's rule to take each of his own boys in turn, to train them before handing them over to work for wages with other colliers. So I went to work with Dai Het, a splendid workman who was too fond of the beer for his own good. A good sort, one of the many thousands of such good sorts who were such assets to coalowners and brewers. He had a moustache of which he was proud, a long and wavy moustache that waved its way right across the lower part of his face to stand a good half-inch outside the gill. I was working with him when the Boer War started in November, the month I was born in; and I was still working with Dai Het when, not long after the Boer War started, Keir Hardie was returned to Parliament as the junior member for Merthyr. Dai Het and our dad voted for him. Keir Hardie's return was a great surprise, not only to many people of Merthyr, but all the people of Wales and Britain.

Our two members, Welshmen both, and both men in good standing, had been sitting together in the House of Commons

for twelve years. One interested in collieries and other things ; the other interested in a gold-mine and other things. In '92, and again in '95, they had simply wiped the floor with their opponents. Now, in 1900, when we had a war on our hands, a war that followed close on the heels of a long, bitter and costly industrial war, "the damned fools"—as one of Merthyr's leading Conservatives called 'em—"goes and votes for a red-hot Socialist who's against the war. I wouldn't say so much if he was a Welshman—or any sort of a Christian man. But this Scotch feller is an agitator who's too damned lazy to work for a living—daren't show his face in his own country. Never been inside a chapel or a church—and he comes to Merthyr, Merthyr of all places. Merthyr, where we've always prided ourselves on—— Oh, it makes me bloody wild."

That I heard in the bar of the theatre whilst waiting for the fresh supply of sweets and biscuits Mrs. Smithson was filling my basket with—how I got that job will presently be explained. It was—Keir Hardie's return—a great shock to many people. The defeated candidate himself, defeated by somebody he hardly knew, or had ever seen, defeated by an almost unknown stranger after having for twelve years done, so he said he could prove, his "level best for our town", didn't know what to make of us in Merthyr. Had we gone mad? What else was he to assume? Had he ever turned a deaf ear to appeals for subscriptions? Had he not at all times co-operated with the senior member, Mr. D. A. Thomas? Then why this—this madness of Socialism? "Socialism," he warned us, "means Sedition—Anarchy—No Government—No King—No God—Darkness."

Whatever it meant, Merthyr decided to have it, "gulped" it down, for the Socialist had only addressed a couple of eve-of-the-poll meetings to get returned. But those were enough for those who remembered him speaking during the stoppage of '98, and had in pit and works talked about the man one to the other. I was in a position to hear both sides, Hardie's supporters in the pit, and his opponents in the theatre bars when getting my supplies each night, for I had got myself a spare-time nightly job at the theatre.

The boy who since the opening had been selling, on commission for Mrs. Smithson, the proprietor's wife, sweets and biscuits and oranges and pop in the theatre gallery, left because his people moved away into the Rhondda Valley. I had been two nights on duty at the theatre before dad knew. Then somebody told him.

"What's this I hear about you selling lollypops in the theatre?" he said.

"He's not doing any harm," said mam.

"Woman, that boy's got plenty to do down the pit every day of the week—yes, plenty. Dai Het pays him to work, not to sleep on his feet, as he will be if he's 'lowed to go running round that theatre till late every night of the week. But he's not going to, so there's an end to it. Do you hear me, boy?"

Knowing silence was best if mam was to help, I said nothing.

"We mustn't stand in our own light, Dai," she said. "He tells me that the boy that's there now selling down in the pit an' stalls makes as much as half a sovereign a week—an' more than that at holiday-times. We've still got some back-rent to clear off; an' there's plenty wanted by these that's going to school. We're in no state to throw about a half-sovereign a week out of our hands . . ."

As always, she won, not dad's consent, but his grudging acceptance of the position. He did not, could not bring himself to like the theatre any more than mam and us boys could bring ourselves to like the pubs he liked to go to at night.

So I was part of "the front of the house", the place more than any other in which I had longed to serve. Each night I hurried home from the pit to get first tub in which to wash myself all over before changing into my bit of best to go to my work—which was a pleasure—at the theatre. "Take time over your taters an' meat," mam would say night after night. "May be late getting to the theatre," I muttered, as I bolted my food. Sometimes Billa would want to wash in the tub first to go somewhere, but mam said that I was always to have first tub. I was earning seven or eight shillings a week at the theatre, and mam didn't want me to lose that job.

I was learning as well as earning at the theatre, which to me was a sort of night-school and business combined. I got to know something of Shakespeare's work from the F. R. Benson, Bandman-Palmer, and other Shakespearian companies. During those weeks I studied elocution under the too, too articulate players. My music lessons were taken during opera and musical comedy weeks. General deportment and epigrammatic skill was acquired during the weeks when Oscar Wilde's comedies were presented. The Drama in all its categories from the domestic to the high romantic; the silent foolery of such presentations as the "Swiss Express", the horrors of "The Face at the Window", "The Grip of Iron"—one after the other were taken six nights a week after taters an' meat.



No sooner had this week's presentation begun to shape me, along comes an entirely different presentation to undo the work. After the too, too articulate young men of Benson's company had worked hard to improve my diction, along would come some Cockney comedian and his company, and before they started to pack up I was saying "Nah" for "Now," and making my dad stare with my "lor lumme".

"What language is that, boy?"

"It's what he heard the man in the threeatre say," said mam.

"Humph."

My work from the time the doors opened at seven to when the curtain rose at seven-thirty, and during the long intervals, was most strenuous. With my basket loaded with packets of sweets and biscuits I forced my way along between the knees and backs of the good-humoured gallery patrons. Having emptied my basket of sweets and biscuits, I dashed off for the basket of oranges placed ready by Mrs. Smithson. Always gave them a basket of oranges after sweets and biscuits—when the oranges finished being juicy, we gave them a few dozen bottles of Hansard's champagne cider at tuppence a bottle to wash the sweets and biscuits down. The difficulty with the "pop" was that one could not travel the rows with the wooden cases which held a dozen bottles apiece. So we had to rely upon willing patrons to "pass 'em along", and to pass the money back down to where I stood on the grand circle side of the barrier. So the pop was not such a satisfactory line as the oranges, sweets or biscuits—for this reason alone. After guiding a bottle from the barrier to half-way up the crowded gallery—"pass it up, please"—down would come big silver. Then one had to guide the patron's change back up to him. "What about my change?" No, "pop" wasn't a good line.

My commission on sales was tuppence per shillingworth sold and paid in. All losses due to pilfering, giving patrons too much change, or arising from any other cause whatsoever, I had to stand. My territory was the gallery; Ossie Morris, in a more refined tone of voice, worked the pit and orchestra stalls—neither of us was permitted to even suggest to grand circle patrons that what we had in our baskets was intended for their consumption. It was only with the greatest tact, discretion and diffidence that Ossie worked the two-shilling patrons of the orchestra stalls. My sixpenny galleryites required only bare civility and plenty to eat and drink between the acts. Ossie and I dealt direct with the main source of

supply down in the pit bar, over which the proprietor's wife, Mrs. Smithson, presided. She had once been a principal boy in pantomime. If she was half as good in pantomime as she was as a business woman, then she must have been very good indeed. She was beautiful in a way, though rather skinny—both in figure and in business. She was most efficient in the bottom of the theatre's three bars, all of which were connected by a spiral iron stairway that started to wind its way up from the pit bar, through the circle bar—where drinks cost a pretty penny, and were served by a pretty barmaid—to where old dad Smithson and his second wife worked like blazes in the gallery bar to serve thirsty galleryites through the intervals with Harrap's XXX at tuppence a pint.

During the intervals scene-shifters, beer-shifters—all of us front-of-the-house staff as well—were very busy making money for as long as the curtain was down and house-lights on. It was a rush to get drink, to serve it, to get the money for it. A dash down for fresh supplies of sweets and biscuits. Five-act plays, with at least four longish intervals. Bound to be long, for in some of the plays Matt, the resident stage-manager, and his squad of shilling-per-night scene-shifters sometimes had to have an engine and part of a train ready for the play's most thrilling scene. If it wasn't that it was some other machinery; and if it wasn't machinery, then it was a couple of live and restive horses, a few bloodhounds. Real water, real ships, real engines, real horses, dogs—real everything, all had to be got ready whilst the bars were busy, and Ossie and I shouted "sweets and biscuits".

The orchestra under our own conductor and guest conductors played loudly and swingingly through the intervals, and drowned the noise of scene-shifting, and the "look what you're bloody-well doing" of the scene-shifters. Nobody in front of the house was impatient—well, not as far as the next act of the play was concerned, for there was plenty of time from seven until nearly eleven. Harry Williams, in his place at the bar end of the orchestra, went on beating his drums, triangle, shaking his bells, and making a noise with one of the other dozen or so instruments he was responsible for. At the other end of the orchestra the man standing up to his father fiddle scraped away as though in no hurry. In the centre the conductor waved his baton, that's if he was a guest conductor, one who had come with the production. Our own conductor conducted from before the keyboard of the piano, he was conductor and leader combined. The other members of the orchestra played

under him as if to-morrow would do. The cornet player and trombone player—what players they were!—would, after they had executed some solo, twiddle-bits, proudly brush back their moustaches and salute friends and relatives in different parts of the house. "What do you think of that for playing?"

At every opportunity most of them trooped into the little snug for performers and back-stage staff only, which was behind the public part of the pit bar. There they had a drink in the company of those of the players who preferred going to sending for drink. A splendid little orchestra, the members of which combined magnificently in the marches and waltzes they knew and loved so well. They were all soloists, too. One night little Johnny Baker, who was only a handful, played a solo on his fiddle. Next night the trombone player, a fat man with a big moustache, played "The Heart's Bowed Down with Weight of Woe". But it was the cornet player that brought the house down with his fast-tonguing variations of popular and classic numbers. Yes, a splendid little orchestra.

Ossie and I checked up with Mrs. Smithson each night after the last act had commenced. Then, instead of going home to my bed to get some sleep, I always went back-stage, where I stayed for as long as Matt, our resident stage-manager, would let me. Now, with the last act in progress, and not having any more—well, not much if any scene-shifting to do, Matt was not so irritable. So I hung about the stage. Pantomime and musical comedy chorus ladies within a yard of me dressed in tights, "can-can" costumes—all sorts of costumes. Some of them sent me to tell the oyster-man who had the freedom of our bars to come back-stage, others sent me down to the performers' snug for stout and other liquids, which I carried up to the dressing-rooms.

The oyster-man was a Scot, and his name was Hardy; he was a great man with the oyster knife. Four for thruppence he sold his oysters, but he used to give me a couple for nothing for fetching him back-stage to do business with the players, who liked stout and oysters when finished for the night. The oyster-man wasn't the only man who gave me things for fetching him. Some weeks, when there was a beauty chorus, there were gents in the grand circle who gave me sixpences to take notes, and for bringing notes. Some of these gents sometimes managed to find their way back-stage, either down the steps from the grand circle bar, or up the steps from the performers' snug on to the stage to talk to the ladies. Once a gent who had come through the performers' snug forgot himself, and



must have thought he was going down to the stage from the grand circle bar. For he landed down the bottom of the stone steps leading into the darkness beneath the stage, the place the pantomime demons popped up from ; and from where the man playing the ghost of Hamlet's father used to moan : "Swear." This gent, who had spent most of the night in the bar, fell down there and hurt hisself. When I was going to fetch a couple of bottles of stout for one of the ladies I heard him groaning, so I went to see. One of his hands was bleeding, and there was a rip in the knee of his trousers. So instead of going up to the stage he went out through the big double-doors, which I bolted after him.

Whilst the Boer War was on the Welsh National Eisteddfod came to our town, and I pretended that I was ill to get away from the theatre to go to one of the Eisteddfod concerts, the one at which Eleanor Jones-Hudson was advertised to sing with Ben Davies. I wanted to hear Eleanor Jones-Hudson, whom we had known when she was living amongst us as Ellen Jones. I knew her two brothers, with whom I worked after I left Dai Het, in the two-coals seam at Cwm Pit. We used to talk, her brothers and I, about Ellen, who had gone to London to make a name, and to marry Eli Hudson, the famous flautist. So now that she was coming back to her native place as Madame Eleanor Jones-Hudson, to sing at our National Eisteddfod concert with the great Ben Davies, I wanted to hear her. So I said I was ill, and Mrs. Smithson said that I'd better go home and go to bed. I thanked her and went to the National Eisteddfod Pavilion to the concert.

There is one category of drama which stands out during this period, and which had a marked effect on me, namely, patriotic drama. For two years off and on we had been having patriotic plays and sketches and singers and elocutionists, with the result that the theatre became an intensely patriotic place, and I, as one of the front-of-the-house staff, became intensely patriotic. Listening one week to "Good-bye, Dolly Gray", the next to : "The Boers Have Got My Daddy" ; followed by the elocutionist who recited Kipling's "Absent-Minded Beggar", I became fired with I don't know what altogether. Then there were the Mafficking nights, when the audience joined in the chorus of :

One, two, three, the relief of Kimberley,  
Four, five, six, the relief of Ladysmith,  
Seven, eight, nine, the relief of Mafeking,  
And there'll be a hot time in the old town to-night. . . .

In the performers' snug behind the pit bar, and on the stage, I heard actors and actresses speak contemptuously of such pro-Boers as Lloyd George and Keir Hardie. Heard many an actor say, as he stood with glass in hand, that if only he were young enough, or fit enough, he would not be playing Merthyr that week. No, he would be playing his part in the far greater drama that was being played to the death out on the burning veldt of South Africa. Something like that, only much more, they said and said and said. Listening, I decided that I must play my part in the great drama that was being played out on the burning veldt of South Africa. Twice during my seventeenth year I presented myself at the Armoury where the recruiting sergeant waited for recruits. The first time he wouldn't as much as look at me ; the second time he did look me over. "Barely five-foot-two," he muttered. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"You don't look it—anyway, you're no good to me."

"But I'm strong, and——"

"You're no good to me."

Out I went.

## CHAPTER XI

### “THERE GOES MY SOLDIER BOY”

At last dad, with Frank and Billa's help, had built the kitchen out the back for us to wash all over in ; and for our mam to do her washing in. I didn't help much with the building, couldn't, for I had to get off to the theatre, but Billa and Frank—for Frank was now working in the pit, and Dave was in his place at Thomas the butcher's—they, Billa and Frank, helped dad to build the kitchen out in our back-yard. They carried and, when they were able to borrow a barrow, wheeled ready-dressed stones from the ruins of the old Penydarren Works, at the top end of which the power-house of our new electric tramway and lighting system stood.

Dad made a good job of the kitchen he built with Frank and Billa's help out in our back-yard. Mam said that his father—our dad's father, Frank the mason, who was dead—couldn't have done a better job. That might be, but the worst was that the building of that kitchen out in our back-yard put our dad on his back in bed for six months all but one week.

No wonder, for he went at it in his sweaty pit-clothes each evening as soon as he had had his taters an' meat, and went on working at it until it was too dark to see properly. He had hardly finished it when he began coughing and shivering like anything, so mam told him to take a day in bed. Frank, she said, could get a day with one of the other men in the pit. After a day in bed he was worse, so mam sent down for Dr. James, who was Dr. Webster's chief assistant. He came, had a look at dad. “Pleurisy,” he told our mam when he came out into the middle of the living-room after he had shut the door of the room where dad was lying fast in bed. Told mam to poultice dad, and gave her a note for medicine, which Billa fetched from the surgery the same night.

In less than two weeks dad was out of his senses, and mam had to watch him night and day. Me and Billa took charge of dad's working-place in the pit, which we worked as well as any two men. Frank went to work with the man Billa had been



working with up to the time dad was took bad. For weeks our mam didn't have chance to take her clothes off, so one Saturday night me and Billa made her go to sleep upstairs in our bed, leaving us to watch dad and tend on him. She wouldn't at first, but we made her go, for we knew that if we didn't we should have her bad in bed as well, and then it would be domino on all of us. So, after she had told us what to do, and what to give, she went upstairs for her first night's sleep for a month.

Billa and me sat watching dad, and tending him through the night. He babbled away through the whiskers which he had grown during the little over a month he had been lying fast in bed, and the whiskers on his thin face made him look like the Jesus in the picture over the mantelpiece out in the living-room. Billa dropped off to sleep not long after mam went upstairs to our bed, and I didn't bother to wake him just then. Later, when I felt sleep coming too heavy on me, I would. When I saw dad's mouth working like if he was thirsty I held the cup with the lemon-water to his mouth like mam said.

In the heavy middle of the night his mouth opened and stayed open, and his breathing made a sound, a funny sound. I gave him some more of the lemon water. Later I gave him medicine on the big spoon. After the medicine his mouth closed, and stayed closed—but not quite. Breathing easier. Faintly, from the distance, the mournful whistle of a railway engine travelling through the night. Never before had the whistle of a railway engine sounded like that to my ears. Like a last good-bye. Presently another railway engine whistled shortly. A dog barked. Washington Morgan, the sculptor's dog, by the sound of it. Washington Morgan, who dressed gravestones and called himself a sculptor, lived not far from our house in a big house with a wall around. He wore clothes of fine grey cloth, and smoked his cigar on the way down to his yard and workshop on Pontmorlais Square. He also had a well-kept beard—Mrs. Lewis, the end house, her Plymouth Rock cock, the one that's always fighting. Better wake Billa.

In time dad came to his senses, and he knew us again, but we were not allowed to bother him—not even when he obviously wanted to talk to us. But as he began to pick up he talked to me and Billa about the working of his place in the pit. Proudly we assured him that he needn't worry. "We're filling as much coal as any two men in the Gellideg seam." That

pleased him. But to keep it up until he was well again—which won't be long now, thank God—we must remember what he had taught us. "Keep your fast end of the working place well on, for if that end goes behind it fastens the coal right through the working place. Then keep the rock-roof and bottom well on, for the nearer the tram is kept to the coal the quicker you'll fill it."

Now that he was gaining a bit there was a short conference each morning before we went to the pit, and at night when we got home. From his bed he directed the working of his place in the pit, and Billa and me were all the better for his skilled direction. He looked more like our old dad every day, for a man had shaved the whiskers off his face, which was putting on flesh. It was a treat to see our mam tending him, and feeding him. Though neither of them had ever acted soft in front of us children—more often quarrelling than acting soft in front of us—we, the eldest, were now becoming aware of the deep and abiding love they had for each other. The way she looked down on him lying in his bed, and the way he looked up at her from his bed was enough to show us, Billa and me at any rate, their love for each other.

He was back at work the week following the finish of the war in South Africa, and once he was back at work, and I was back with the man I had worked with prior to dad's illness, my interest in dad was not so keen as it had been for months past. I began to think of the army again, which was no wonder after the two and a half years' drenching with patriotism in the theatre. It was now too late to take part in the actual fighting, but surely it was not too late to help with the "mopping-up" of De Wet and all those other treacherous Boers who had for so long been sniping at our brave boys from behind boulders and kopjies and—and all those other things out in South Africa.

With another seventeen-year-old—rising eighteen—I again tried to enlist, and this time, thinking I was going to join the Dragoon Guards, I actually did get into the militia battalion of the Welsh Regiment. I was disgusted when I learnt at the Depot of the Welsh Regiment, which was at Cardiff, that it was the militia we were in. "But," I said to the corporal who marched us from where the doctor had inspected us to the quartermaster's stores for our kits, "I told the listing-sergeant that it was the Dragoon Guards I wanted to join. And he said, 'Yes, of course'." The corporal said: "Shut up, you shrimp."

Before we had been two full days at the Depot my listing-chum was claimed out under age, as I could have been had I wanted to. But I was anxious to get out to South Africa to do my bit, and so rejected with scorn Chris Watkins' suggestion that he should go and tell my people that I wanted them to come down to Cardiff to claim me out. "I'm not a baby—if you are."

When nearing the end of my training as a militia-man I transferred into the regular army, and it was as a proper soldier that I went home for a few days' leave before leaving the Depot to join the details at Plymouth. "Haven't you finished your training?" said dad, when he saw me before him in uniform.—"Yes, but I've joined the reg'lars."—"But you're not old enough, you're not eighteen till November."—"I know, but I told 'em I was eighteen last November."—"Damn your eyes— Never mind, I'll have you out of 'em before you're much older."—"If you do, I'll go in November." Then he went on to say what everybody in Merthyr—and probably elsewhere at that time—thought about soldiers when there wasn't a war on. "Boy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Only them that runs from the p'lice, an' them that are too lazy to work, goes to the army."

"Leave him alone, Dai," mam said.

"What, leave him alone to go an' mix up with the scum of the earth in the army? Woman, there's your theatre for you. There's 'Good-bye, Dolly Gray,' for you. Now, now when he's beginning to earn tidy money, now, now when he could be working in a place of his own, an' helping to rear these others, he goes—goes—— Look at him, just look at him, the little red-herring——"

"Leave the boy alone, Dai. He's only got till Monday, so let him make the most of it. P'raps by Monday he'll change his mind about letting us claim him out—or buying him out if we fail to claim him out. Sit down to your food, my boy."

Neither mam's diplomacy nor dad's blustering in the least affected my determination to go to South Africa as soon as I could possibly get there, as I eventually did, after I had fired my dutyman's course at Plymouth, where I was imposed upon by an old sweat or two, one of whom tattooed my forearm for a half-crown. The other took me out with him one double pay-night. It was not to the place presided over by Miss Agnes Weston that he took me; but there were ladies of a sort in the place that he took me to. In one public-house, the name of which was "The Bunch of Grapes"—though that was



not how my guide referred to it—he said : “ I think we’ll anchor here for the rest of the night.”

A few hours later we walked uphill to where the details were sleeping, most of them, up on Crown Hill. My week’s pay, also the half-crown postal order from home, had been spent by no means wisely. I spent about ten days in Raglan Barracks, Devonport, before leaving for South Africa.

The troopship coaled at Las Palmas, where the natives, when carrying the coal in baskets on their heads, reminded me of mam and dad. Of the way mam carried the baskets of food on her head up the mountain-sides during the long mining stoppage of ’98. The coal, which I could tell was Welsh coal, “ Best Welsh,” reminded me of dad and Billa and Frank, who no doubt were down in the darkness of the Gellideg seam of Cwm pit at the time I watched the natives from the deck of the troopship, where it was all sunshine—no, not all sunshine. Those black men and women on the trot with baskets of coal on their heads. Up one gangway and down the other. Never stopping. Carrying our coal, “ Best Welsh ”. Did those black people know how my dad and my brothers hewed it lying on their sides in the thin Gellideg seam ? Did dad and Billa and Frank know how these black men and women coaled the ship on which I was travelling to Africa ? On the trot all the time, perspiring freely. There were other natives selling fruit, fruit that was cheaper than coal at Las Palmas.

Funny. What ? Coal—and fruit. Coal which I had hewed in the Gellideg seam in Cwm pit, and the oranges I had hawked in the gallery of the theatre. Now I was standing idle on the ship’s deck, from where I watched the black men, women and children carrying and hawking what I had carried and hawked for a livelihood.

“ In a trance, Joney,” said Buck.

“ No, just thinking.”

“ About what ? ”

“ About coal and——” But Buck knew little about coal, for he was a native of Monmouth town, so I didn’t trouble him with my thoughts. He was a merry-eyed boy of about my own age who had come from the Depot to join the details at Plymouth about a month after I had. We had chummed up, and we were hoping to be posted to the same company of the regiment when we reached Pretoria. Both of us had lost what money we had leaving Southampton, lost it playing Crown and Anchor, so now we had nothing to prevent us from seeing all there was to be seen from the ship’s deck. Watching the por-

poises ; an attendant shark that followed and snapped at our ship's refuse until he was too full to swim fast enough to keep up with us. Passing ships, which at night reminded me of the illuminated frontage of the theatre at home. Table Bay, Cape Town, Table Mountain, all in the one day, as we steamed in, disembarked and entrained, made it all seem like the matinees of Poole's Myriorama that we children used to enjoy for a penny apiece in the Temperance Hall at home. Everything somehow reminding me of home, the further I went, the more I thought about home.

Without having seen more of Cape Town than could be seen from the ship's deck, we boarded the train which was waiting on the docks' siding, in which we started our long up-country journey. We stopped at some station which differed from the other stations we stopped at in one thing only. On the platform, under armed guard, evidently waiting for the down-train, there were about a hundred Boer prisoners. No doubt some of the last sweepings of the "sweeping-up" I had so wanted to take part in. From the windows of our compartments we made fun of the Boer prisoners until the sergeant in charge of the armed guard told us to stop it. Our train stopped there for some time—I believe it was single line beyond the station both ways, and we had to wait the down-train in. Whilst waiting we looked across at the Boers whom some of us had for long been so anxious to have a smack at. The longer we looked—though perhaps I had better speak for myself. The longer I looked at them, the less inclined was I to fight, or even make fun of them. For they stood, bearded most of them, in a way as made their khaki-clad armed guards appear insignificant in comparison, and made me feel rather ashamed. Made me feel as though—in shouting at them as I did until the sergeant shut us all up—I had been shaming my own father and his father. The Boer prisoners were of three generations, I thought. Boys of my own age, men about my dad's age, with the eldest section about as old as my granter was when he died. They were dressed in clothes like those granter and dad used to wear the time granter was alive—and the look in their eyes I had seen in granter's and dad's eyes when they spoke of the "foreigners", the English, Irish, Scotch and other nationalities who had crowded into Merthyr in the wake of the English industrial adventurers who transformed our more or less peaceful and beautiful country into hell upon earth. I was beginning to understand why Lloyd George had been so pro-Boer when the down-train came to

take the Boer prisoners to wherever they were being taken to ; and to allow us free passage to where our regiment was in camp overlooking their one-time capital of Pretoria.

When we reached East Camp, Pretoria, our draft was split up into eight sections, one section for each company. The R.S.M. pushed his hand between me and Buck and shouted : "From here to the left, left turn. E company. Quick march." Off I marched in disappointment because Buck had not also been posted to E company. In E company's lines those of us who had been posted to this company were again split up, so many to each tent. Jinks, Taylor, Houlder and myself were directed to a bell tent in which two war veterans were sleeping off their midday beer. They woke up to look us over. We stood smiling down on them.

"You kids come with the draft?" said one of them.

"Yes, the colour-sergeant said we was to sleep in here," said Jinks.

"Ay, plenty bloody room for you," he said, sitting up.

"What about a wash," he asked the other war veteran.

"We could do with a wash too," said Jinks.

"Then get your towels out of your kit-bags and come along wi' us."

We each of us got our towels and soap out of our kit-bags—neither of the war veterans had soap, so they used ours. When we got down to the troughs we stripped to the waist and had the first good sluish since leaving Raglan Barracks, for one can never have a good wash on a troopship or on a train. Feeling fresh after the wash, we asked the war veterans questions. They showed us where we had to go to wash our dirty greybacks and socks and things, and on our way back to the company's lines they told us that they had not long come back to the regiment from the mounted infantry in which they had served during the latter half of the war. Standerton, I believe the name of the place was that they said they had been last before coming back to the regiment at Pretoria.

"Yes, an' if we'd have been wise we'd have stopped at Jo'burg and changed into civvies instead of coming to this hole," said one of them. "It's money for nothing in Jo'burg now that the Boers have been cleared away from there."

"Civvies? Do you mean desert?" said Jinks.

"What else?"

The other one started to explain the lay-out of the camp, starting with the wet-canteen marquee, and finishing with the wet-canteen marquee. "See where them trees are? that's



officers' tents an' mess. Them two tents with the barbed wire round's the guard-tent. That tin shanty there's the sergeants' mess. Them marquees at the end of each company's lines are the mess marquees—it's mostly pozzy an' bully we gets to eat there. That little place there's the dry canteen where you can buy blanco an pinkah if you want any—I never use any, for I've finished shanaming for 'em. Them two marquees next each other down that end's the *wet*-canteen—— Got any money any of you?"

Jinks was the only one of us four of the draft with money, for he had been lucky at Crown and Anchor the day before the ship sighted Cape Town. He had been broke, but he sold one of his greyback shirts for two shillings, with which he had played and won two pounds odd, which he stuck to. He had nearly two pounds still left. This information made the two war veterans most friendly and helpful.

"Fall in the draft," the big colour-sergeant was shouting as we returned to the lines.

"That's all Baby Smith will be shouting for the next week," one of the old veterans said.

The company colour-sergeant referred to as "Baby Smith" by the war veterans was a fine figure of a man, with a rosy, babyish face on which his black moustache seemed out of place. He wanted to talk to us chaps of the newly-arrived draft of camp sanitation, and to warn us of this, that, and the other; he also told us that there would be a kit inspection next morning after breakfast.

"The orderly sergeant—but where is the orderly sergeant?" he asked the orderly-corporal who was in attendance.

"Can't say, colour-sergeant—unless he's in the sergeants' mess."

The colour-sergeant looked from us lined up before him towards the tin shanty from where the sound of a piano and singing faintly reached us. He sighed, then turned his eyes to us again.

"Don't forget, after breakfast in the morning, kit inspection. Let me see—no, there's nothing else——"

"What about their blankets, colour-sergeant?" said the orderly corporal.

"Oh, yes, blankets."

After we had drawn blankets, and made our beds on the floor of the tent with the help of the two war veterans—who wouldn't let Jinks do anything—we went in a body down to the canteen, which was the only place to go to, it seemed.

For the camp was deserted soon after late tea of bread and pozzys, the last meal of the day. The meal over, the exodus from camp to the wet-canteen was general. In and around the two marquees there were hundreds of war veterans in their most expansive mood, getting acquainted with us chaps of the draft. The beer, after a day in the barrel under canvas on which a hot sun had shone, was almost luke-warm, and, by the time one got the "last swig" out of the quart pot it was also gritty owing to the sand kicked about by the queues trampling their way through into the place where they were served, and out again. So I passed the pot without supping more often than not, for beer at its best had but little hold on me.

But I sat with the others, smoking and listening to the talk of the war veterans. Of battles in which they had fought; of how one of them had been sand-bagged and robbed of his blow-belt full of golden sovereigns as on the way to camp from Pretoria, where he had had a French gel in the house which was full of young French gels—"no more'n kids some of 'em."—in Prinzloo Street. If only he could get his hands on the man—"but there was two of 'em"—that had sandbagged him and took his blow-belt as full—"ay, as full and as round as a bloated snake with golden sovereigns it was".

"So watch yourselves whenever you go down to Pretoria for a night out," said the other. "For myself, I'd rather spend my money here in our own canteen—but if you ever do go down, look out for the sandbaggers, for my pal's only one of scores of our chaps who've been sandbagged and robbed."

"That house I was telling you about in Prinzloo Street," said the one who told us he was sandbagged and robbed. "All French gels. Talk about class. . . . Place like a palace, an'— Of course, it's officers they've pinked the place up for. Still, if ever you do get a couple of pound, I can get you in . . ."

So the evening passed, before we left the canteen for our beds in the bell tent. Next morning after breakfast we chaps of the last draft, after we had done our share of cleaning up and washing up, laid out our kits ready for inspection in the lines. On our waterproof sheets we placed everything as tidy as we knew how, and with our regimental numbers showing on each and every article. 7647 was my regimental number. When all was arranged we stood at ease behind our respective displays of His Majesty's property, waiting for whoever was coming to inspect them. The war veterans of the company,

who didn't appear to have anything at all to do, lounged about, and now and again corrected a fault in the placing of an article of one or the other kits on display, which helped them to pass away the time until "opening time" of the canteen.

As time went on the two war veterans of our tent grew most anxious. It was nearing "opening-time", and still nobody had come to inspect our kits. Jinks was the only one with money, and he could not leave his kit to take them or himself down to the canteen. They stopped the orderly corporal. "Who's supposed to come and inspect these lads' kits?" "The orderly sergeant." "Where is he?" "Where he always is." "Can't you or Baby Smith——?" "No, the colour-sergeant is down in Pretoria with the company officer—— Here's the orderly sergeant coming from the mess."

"We'll be waiting for you down the canteen," said one of the two war veterans as they moved off.

We chaps of the draft were watching the sergeant who was moving towards where we stood behind our kits. His face wore a savage expression. He stopped to inspect the first of the displays. "Huh, is that how you lay your kits out for inspection? Well, it may do for the Depot, but it won't do for the forty-first." Without as much as looking at the other kits he ripped the waterproof sheet from under each display in turn, with much the same result as when one pulls the tablecloth from under a table ready laid—only our things didn't break. They were disarranged and dirtied.

"Have those kits laid out properly—properly, I said—by three o'clock this afternoon." Back to the sergeants' mess he then went. We bagged our kits and dumped them in the tent.

"The man's drunk," said Jinks.

"He's mad," said Taylor.

"He's both," said Houlder.

I couldn't speak for rage. No sergeant, I felt, should treat men so. War veteran though he was, and "rookies" though we might be, it was not right that our kits should be tilted off our waterproof sheets into the waste-water trench between the company's lines. If it could be proved that he had fought and suffered in every war from the Siege of Troy to the relief of Mafeking I couldn't, wouldn't, ever forgive him for what he had that day done to my kit, which——

"Come on, let's go down the canteen," said Jinks.

The two war veterans in whose tent we had slept a night were impatiently awaiting us—well, Jinks, who had the money to buy the beer they said they were "spitting blacking for the



want of". When Jinks, after the first four pots had been fetched, told the two war veterans what the sergeant had done to us and our kits, they were most indignant. Called the sergeant every name they could think of; and the one who had the day previous talked about Jo'burg and civvies again said that if ever a sergeant did to him what had that day been done to us, it would be to the Kaffirs he'd next show his kit——

"We haven't much time," said the other, handing him two of the four empty pots, and looking at Jinks, who said: "Neither have I got much of that two pounds left." He had not a penny left when we had finished the first of that day's sessions at the canteen. After dinner in the mess marquee, the two war veterans, no longer interested in us for the reason that all Jinks' money was spent on beer and fags, went to have a sleep in the tent. We four, and the chaps of our draft who slept in the other tents in our company's lines, again most neatly arranged our kits on our waterproof sheets. How careful we were, how neat all our kits looked as we stood waiting for the sergeant.

It was nearer four than three o'clock when he was seen leaving the sergeants' mess. If there had been any doubt about his being under the influence of drink earlier in the day, there could be no doubt about it now. He stood swaying—too drunk to see anything—about half-way along the line of displayed kits. "Nothing like it," he growled. "Blurry awful . . . awfu' . . . T'-morrer mornin', at ten o'clock . . . I wanna see them kits laid out prop'ly. . . . Prop'ly . . . You're in the forty-firs' regiment of the line, not in the blurry militia. T'-morrer mornin'. . . . Ten o'clock . . . shar'."

"I'll see you in hell first," muttered Jinks as the sergeant staggered away to his tent to sleep off what was evidently making him so difficult to please.

"To-night—as soon as it's dark enough—I shall be waiting for that swine with something heavy," said Taylor, as he began stuffing his things into his kit-bag.

"An' I'll be with you," said Houlder.

"I won't," said Jinks, "for as soon as it's dark I shall be humping this lot up to where the Kaffirs are to flog it. The Kaffirs in that camp up there will give their eye-teeth for this kit of mine; an' they can have it for enough to get me to the Rand."

"Desert, do you mean?" I said.

"What else? You don't think I'm going to stay here for that swine to carry on playing merry hell with me, do you? No fear. Get some civvies an' money off the Kaffirs in exchange for this lot, then I'm making for the Rand, where chaps like us, who're used to underground work—— But let's go up the mess tent where we can talk."

We dumped our kit-bags in the tent where the two war veterans were snoring away, then went, only us four, up to the mess marquee, which between meals was usually unoccupied.

"Now," said Jinks. "Along what they call the Rand there's gold mines, which are much the same as our pits at home. But for hewing gold they pays better wages than for hewing coal. They're short of men used to working underground——"

"Who told you they are?" said Taylor.

"Didn't you hear what the chap said down the canteen as well as I did? Certainly you did. Once we get to the Rand we'll be able to get any amount of work. Well, are you game?"

We were. "Right," said Jinks. "Only us four—say nothing to any of the other chaps of our draft, for——"

"What about asking Buck to come with us?" I said.

"No, nobody, four's as much as can manage it at a time . . ."

As soon as it was dark we left camp unnoticed with our kits, for the camp itself was practically deserted. Privates and other ranks up to corporal down the bottom end of camp in and around the canteen; sergeants and warrant-officers in the sergeants' mess; and the officers' in the officers' mess, in front of which the regimental band was playing a musical comedy number as we began our flight into the unknown. There was a skyful of moon and stars above as we left our bell-tent carrying our kit-bags hugged close as though it were a girl or something. From the bell-tent to the mess marquee at the upper end of the lines. From there we looked out to see if the cart-road beyond the camp was clear. "All clear," whispered Jinks. We followed him out on to the road, then, bent double, kit-bags under our arms now, we puffed our way across country to the Kaffir camp. Jinks had explained that the Kaffirs we were hurrying to negotiate with were not wild men with spears and things, but "chaps like ourselves—only black. Drivers of mule-carts, and chaps who do odd jobs about the town."

Yet they didn't look much like "ourselves" to me from where I stood viewing them from the edge of their encamp-

ment. They seemed huge and wild as they moved between the camp-fires.

"I'm not having anything to do with that bloody lot," said Taylor nervously as he turned about. But it was too late, for one of them had seen us. About a score of them rushed out of the firelight to surround us in the darkness.

"Myn uffern i," said Jinks, frightened into speaking Welsh.

Laughing and shouting, the Kaffirs escorted us to their encampment, which was composed of ragged and flimsy shelters collected from abandoned military camps, by the look of them. Out of these shelters Kaffirs poured to add their numbers to those surrounding us. Those nearest to us pointed to our kit-bags and shouted: "You show, we buy." They had evidently had visitors of our sort before.

"We're all right," said Jinks, opening his bag. We all opened our bags, and four simultaneous sales, at which the bidding was as brisk as it was confused, took place. In a few minutes we had disposed of all His Majesty the King's property—even the kit-bags. The next lots to be offered were the clothes and boots we were wearing. Our greatcoats were at once snapped up; and bidding for our boots was keen once it became known that we were disposing of them providing we could get some less noticeable footwear from the Kaffirs in addition to the price we asked. Plenty of footwear was soon forthcoming. Button-up boots and elastic-sided and a great variety of shoes from heavy brogues to sandshoes, out of which we selected a pair apiece. Now there only remained to exchange our trousers and tunics, in exchange, or part exchange with the cash in our favour, for civilian garments. Again a-plenty. Rags, for the most part, rags that even a self-respecting British ragman would turn his nose up at.

When arrayed in a most weird combination of these garments, we left the friendly Kaffirs as delighted as women who had had a good morning at an annual sale. "There, didn't I tell you?" said Jinks as we started off across country.

"It was touch an' go," said Taylor. "They was in two minds about flattening us and pinching our kits."

"Not they——"

"Never mind them now. Where are we going to, that's what I want to know?" said I.

"This is the way to the Rand, where we'll get jobs in one of the pits," said Jinks.

"Don't they call 'em mines out here?" said Taylor.

"Whatever they call 'em, that's where we're going to work,"



said Jinks confidently. "We've enough money to buy scoff till we get there ; an' in these clothes nobody'll be able to tell that we're deserters."

"Wait till we see what we've got on in daylight," Houlder said.

After we had been moving across country for some time Jinks said : "We can get back on to the road now."

"What road?" said Taylor.

"The road that runs past our camp, the road that goes to Jo'burg," Jinks said patiently.

"How do you know it goes to Jo'burg?"

"Didn't that chap we was with down the canteen—— Look here, Taylor. Before we go any further, you may as well know that I won't stick much more of your how an' what an' why talk. The end of it'll be I'll be landing you on the jaw."

Taylor shut up, for Jinks was as big as any two of us others.

After we had been walking half the night Jinks said it was now safe to have a downer.

"Where?" said Taylor.

"Somewhere about here." Jinks turned off the road to where there was a hollow overgrown with trees. "This is all right."

So it was for a time. Then we began to feel the cold of the early South African morning piercing through the ragged and thin civilian clothes we had swopped our own khaki uniforms for.

"I wish I hadn't sold my greatcoat to them Kaffirs," said Taylor shiveringly.

"Shut up an' go to sleep," said Jinks.

"I wish I could." He sat up and asked : "Is this the part of Africa where the lions are?"

"Lions?" said Jinks, sitting up.

"Ay, lions. Haven't you heard of African lions?"

"Ay, an' seen 'em in cages."

"Well, this is where they're not in cages."

"Here, what do you mean, Taylor?" I asked.

"I was just wondering, that's all——"

"It is too damned cold to sleep out here. Come on," said Jinks.

For four days and nights we trekked, or rather strayed around, objects of derision for both black and white people. We were known for what we were, and treated accordingly. Poor whites refused us a drink of water, which they said they

had to carry long distances. The whites in charge of wayside stores, Portuguese, probably, over-charged us for tinned food-stuffs, fruit. Our money was all gone. We were passing a fairly large house with a yard in front, a big yard covered with mule harness laid out as though to harness many mules for a long trek. We were parched. We turned off the road into the yard. On a sort of balcony which went round as much of the house as we could see, a middle-aged bearded man was sat reading a paper.

"A drink of water, please," Jinks croaked.

The man, without taking his eyes off us, and without a word in reply, tapped the wooden framework of the window behind him, which was open, and in which a black man with a green baize apron on appeared. The man sitting murmured, and the black man disappeared to presently reappear around the side of the house, carrying a stone jug filled with water icy cold, and four glasses, all on a big silver tray. Two glasses apiece we had, and we said: "Thank you very much," first to the black man holding the tray, and then to the man sitting on the balcony, neither of whom opened their mouths. Just looked. So we went.

Down the road we met a black man who smiled as everybody smiled when they saw us. "Here, Johnny," said Jinks, "who lives in that house up there?"

"Big Boer general man."

I believe the black man said his name was Erasmus. Was there a Boer general named Erasmus? However, he gave us the only refreshing drink we had during those days and nights of straying, gave it us cold, both the water and the welcome. Thanks, man, whoever you were, and wherever you are, in this world or the next.

We were chased off the tops of the mines by irritable whites of the managerial and engineering staffs. We were turned away from doors in the outskirts of Johannesburg where the white people live. In the wood and tin towns where the Kaffir and Indian mine and town workers lived, we were given to eat of such food as they had. Stinking, overcrowded crazy towns knocked up with biscuit tins and provision boxes and corrugated-iron roofing, such towns we begged our way through in fear and trembling. "Cantonments," I believe someone said they were. Cantonments for native workers, fouling the surface of the world's richest patch of earth, gold-bearing and ghastly. Not the natives, God help 'em, but the conditions—

"I've had a bloody 'nough o' this," cried Taylor.

"An' so have I," said Houlder. I was sitting on the roadside with my head in my hands.

"What's up, Joney?" said Jinks.

"Feeling a bit queer, that's all."

"Yes, it looks as if we're whacked," said Jinks.

"I'm giving myself up to the first p'liceman I meet," said Taylor.

"Ay, come on," said Jinks.



## CHAPTER XII

### PRISON—PROMOTION—PUGILISM

At the police station to which we were taken by the policeman to whom we surrendered ourselves, we were provided with a substantial meal before being taken down to one of the large cells, where we joined about a dozen other prisoners, civilian prisoners. During the thirty-six hours we were in their company we learnt that they had committed many crimes, "everything from pitch-an'-toss to manslaughter", was how Jinks put it. They boasted of having done this, that and the other thing; complained about the food that was brought to the cell; about the sanitary arrangements; played cards and told dirty stories. I sat in the corner of the cell feeling a bit queer.

I was glad when the sergeant and escort from Pretoria arrived to take us out of that cell, for I was still feeling rough. Almost toppled over when we stepped out of the train at Pretoria.

"Hold up there," said the sergeant. Then he sighed: "What a bloody sight you fellers are." He marched us out of the station and up the road towards camp in two sections of fours, two soldiers of the escort and two of us deserters in each section. Up along the road which was said to be infested by sandbaggers, the road which I thought was playing tricks on me that day. Rising to meet my foot, wouldn't wait for me to put my foot down in its own time. Then when I was up to that trick the road tried another, that of falling away from my foot, away and downwards, down, down, down . . . "Down, down, down, down, down among the dead men let him lie." Of course, David John Thomas the butcher was singing again, singing his favourite song when he should have been out in the slaughter-house sticking pigs with Walter Curtis. "Where have you been all this time, Johnny? Hurry as fast as you can with this leg of lamb to Plews, the Cottage." Hurry, hurry, always hurry, plenty to do for my shilling and pound of sausage—

"Come on, pick 'em up. Left, right, left— Oh, what a bloody spectacle you chaps are for these people. Step out so as to get up to camp where you'll be out of sight. Disgrace to the regiment. Left, right, left . . ."

Jinks asked : "Feeling rough, Joney?"

"Feel a bit—I don' know—"

"Stop that talking," shouted the sergeant from behind.

"You'll be all right after you've had a downer in the guard-tent," said Jinks.

"Will you stop that talking? Left, right, left . . . Left . . . Left . . . *Halt.*"

"Here, what the hell have you brought us?"

"Can't you see? Ha, ha, they're a turn we're putting on at the mess to-night. Ha, ha— Get in there. Got plenty of room for 'em, I suppose?"

"Yes, we've only got that Darkie Lewis in— How's Jo'burg looking— Can't you see that bloody barbed wire?"

Jinks disentangled me. "Half-a-mo, Joney. There, in you go. The kid's whacked, sarge."

"Shurrup. Bugler, blow for E company's orderly corporal."

I stumbled into the prisoners' tent. "Steady, the Buffs," cried Darkie Lewis, as I fell over him.

Jinks said : "Chum, let this kid have a downer on your blankets till they bring ours down."

"Ay, lie there, kid. Any fags, any of you? Haven't had . . ."

What are they talking about? Who are they? That's Jinks—yes, that's Jink's, our mam— Eh?

It's Jinks, holding me up in the sitting position. Hot tea in lid of mess-tin. Nice. "Now have a good downer, Joney." Went away from 'em, far away . . . They were there again when I returned from where I had been. Somewhere a band is playing. The prisoner who was in the tent when we arrived sings : "Somebody \*\*\*\* on the doorstep, someone swore blind it was me—"—"Shurrup," roared the sergeant of the guard from outside.

Of course, the guard-tent. Africa—it isn't. Is this Africa, our mam? How can it be Africa, boy, with John Thomas there in his pulpit. Zoar Chapel—no more worthy to be called thy son. But why is John Thomas wearing my uniform in the pulpit, our mam? How can it be your uniform, boy? The Kaffirs got your uniform. . . . Boers got my daddy, my soldier da . . . Oranges, sweets, or— You shall have

your change in a minute. Don't you worry, dad, me an' Billa's keeping your working-place as tidy as any two men in the Gellideg seam could——

"Hey, sarge, this bloody kid's raving . . ."

Enteric fever they told me I'd had. One of four dangerous cases around whose beds the death-screens had been put. Three of the four went on, I returned to face a court-martial. Jinks, Taylor and Houlder were soldiering again after having been tried and having served their terms of imprisonment. Forty-two days they got, and that's what I got too. They had been tried together, had there sentences read out together on the same parade, and had been in the same cell for 42 days. I had the court-martial to myself, and a full muster of troops on my parade the day my sentence was read out. I was the leading actor in a scene that recalled to my mind plays I had seen, plays such as "Drummed Out".

The prison I was taken to had once been the headquarters of the Transvaal State Artillery. Cells as large as barrack-rooms with about twenty prisoners in each. My cell-mates were all Irishmen of the Leinster Regiment. I got on all right with them, for I was familiar with the ways of the Irish, who were almost as strong as us Welsh in my hometown. During the day we worked under armed guards. During the long evenings I sat listening to my cell-mates talking and crooning Irish ditties. The one who slept next to me on the floor knew scores of short and sweet Irish songs. When I was leaving he gave me all he had to give, his cap-badge.

"S'long, Taffy—and good luck."

"Same to you, Pat."

My eyes were blinking tears, as they had been when leaving the prisoners' ward of the hospital. Shedding tears when leaving prison and the prisoners' ward of a hospital. Being Welsh and sentimental no doubt accounts for it.

Once outside the prison, free near the town for the first time, I decided to take a look at the house in which Kruger had lived. Not much of a place for a President to live in. The iron and coal kings of my hometown had bigger lodges below their castles. Where was Kruger? I wondered as I stood before the house in which he had lived. Gone.

Back to camp along the sandbaggers' road. Well, I wouldn't be worth sandbagging for quite a time, for by the time I finished paying for new kit to replace what I had sold to the Kaffirs . . .

Jinks, Taylor and Houlder were waiting to welcome me



back to camp——so was Buck. Jinks wanted me to accompany him down to the canteen to help drink the five-shilling postal order he had that day received from home, but I went for a walk with Buck instead.

Next day I started soldiering afresh. The company officer, whose name I believe was Linton, was a fine chap. Not much of a chap to look at, being shaped like a gentlemen-jockey. But he had nice features, and a nice way. "You'll soon get over that," he said, meaning the desertion, court-martial and imprisonment. "I'm going to take the risk of recommending you for a stripe. Despite what has happened, I'm convinced that you have the makings of a good N.C.O. I'm sure that I can rely upon you not to let me down."

"You can, sir."

A week later it was as an unpaid lance-corporal that I moved along the company's lines with pride, and as regimental as a button-stick. The tent of which I was now in charge was the neatest and cleanest in the company's lines, if not in the whole camp. Jinks and the other two who had deserted with me complained that I was enough to drive them to desert again. Maybe I was. At our St. David's Day Sports I was assisting the officer in charge of the boxing events. One of the last draft to join our company, a Welshman who had somehow got hold of such a name as Macnamara, gave the sergeant who had treated our kits so roughly a terrible pasting in the final of the lightweight competition.

Soon after the sports the regiment was skimmed to make up a strong draft for the 2nd battalion in India. Most of us who had reached Africa after the termination of hostilities were skimmed. So there was another break of growing comradeship. "Fall in the draft," was again the cry. Good-bye, sunny South Africa.

With only one young second lieutenant and one N.C.O., myself, in control, the strong draft entrained for Durban. We broke the journey at some place half-way from Pretoria to Durban, where we stayed the night at some quarters from which a cavalry regiment had had to hurry owing to some disease affecting their horses. They left in a hurry, leaving wives and children in married quarters, and the stores, canteen, etc., locked and bolted. There was a river near the place, and the young officer told me that he thought the Victoria Falls were somewhere near.

Buck and I were lying down when the young officer came with his breath in his fist to say that some of our chaps had

broken into the canteen and were now playing old Harry. So they were. Big Kiley, Macnamara and another score or so. There was no sleep for any of us that night. We tried arresting the looters, who proved too much for us. So the officer wired to the nearest unit for an armed detachment, which came with the dawn, the sober dawn, with fixed bayonets.

On the troopship *Clive* the disturbers of the previous night's peace travelled to Bombay under what is called "open arrest", which must have been wide open, for two of the looters profitably worked the Crown and Anchor game on the voyage from Durban to Bombay. As we disembarked I tried to remember the connection. Then my nose came to my aid. That smell almost identical with the smell rising from Morlais Brook during hot summers, the smell which had caused the investigator to link up the Merthyr of that time with Bombay—"reputed to be the filthiest town under British sway".

We marched from the docks to Colaba Depot, where we had to stay until we were acclimatized, inoculated, vaccinated, and I don't know what else. There were some ships of the line in port when we arrived, and there were naval officers at Colaba Depot that night asking if there were any boxers amongst us. The young officer sent for me. "Yes," I said, "we've got some good chaps—Macnamara and young Keeley [not Big Kiley] are extra good. But they're under arrest for—you know, that night, sir. Close arrest, you said, sir."

However, under pressure from the naval officers the young officer in charge of our draft "opened" the arrest of a couple of our boxing prisoners to enable them to take part in a "Navy v. Army" boxing tournament for which the Bombay Gaiety Theatre was booked. Whilst training they were placed on parole with me in close attendance, and it was a most anxious time for me, for they were up to all sorts of tricks.

There were a half-dozen contests staged, in one of which I was the victim. Macnamara made mincemeat of the lightweight pride of the Navy; and young Keeley made rings around the Navy's best feather-weight. The Navy man who should have met our next on the programme did not show up, so I was let in for the lambasting he would have had from Cullis had he been there to take it. It was suggested that I should in order to make a good night's sport, "go" four of the six rounds in which Cullis and the Navy chap had been billed to appear. It was represented to me that I should well be able to after acting as trainer to our team—"All right."

I wore Macnamara's winning trunks and boxing-boots, in

which I was badly beaten. Macnamara said : " Get into him, Joney, get right inside that long left of his." But Cullis wouldn't let me, for that left of his was all the time stabbing my face like a snake mad with the toothache or something. Once only did I get " inside " that left, and received such a short right-hook as convinced me that it was as bad " inside " his left as " outside " his left. I was on my feet when the bell of deliverance rang at the end of round four, but in no state to appreciate the applause, not even the round of applause that was called for " a game loser ".

With swollen lips and a discoloured eye I marched my victorious boxers back to the marquee where the others were under close arrest.

" Have a good night's sport ? " said the sergeant of the guard.

" Splendid. S'long, Mac'. S'long, Keeley."

My eye was still discoloured when we embarked on the Indian Marine steam-packet, the *Canning*, on which, with the draft for the South Wales Borderers, we took another sea-voyage from Bombay to Karachi, where we hoped to spend a few days fraternizing with the chaps of our sister regiment, as we regarded the South Wales Borderers, the good old 24th. We of the Welsh thought more of the chaps of the good old 24th than we did of the chaps of the Royal Welsh Fusileers, so we were hoping to spend a few days with them at Karachi before proceeding by train up-country to Quetta.

But it was not to be, our train was waiting. A slow, stop-at-every-station train it was. We were in it and on it and off it for two days and nights, I believe. I think we slept as it crossed a desert called the Sind. Each time the train stopped during the day most of us wandered off in search of India until recalled by the engine's steam-whistle. Into the hills. Quetta.

The regimental band and goat had come to the station to meet us and to march in front of us up to our barracks. " Men of Harlech " our band played, and the natives looked as the strains of our regimental march awoke whatever there was to wake between us and the high hills with snow on the tops. Buck and I were again hoping to be posted to the same company but here they took us in alphabetical order, so Buck and I were posted to different companies. Mine was B company, the colour-sergeant of which was old Benny Griffiths. Not long after we arrived at Quetta, Mac and the other looters were tried, and I was chief witness for the prosecution. They got



off lightly, for it had all happened so long ago in a place so far away—anyway, why should the second battalion have to right in India the wrong done in Africa. So they got off lightly.

Quetta in my time was a biggish military station. As soon as I got there I was told to "take down" my African stripe. The 2nd had plenty of N.C.O.'s—"real soldiers", I was informed. Indian wallahs able to stand up to their beer and curry—stand up to anything. So revert to private 7647 Jones. There was another infantry battalion besides ours in Quetta. Also a couple of batteries of mountain artillery. Say about three thousand British, and a couple of thousand native soldiers. There was a fort ; hospital ; military cemetery—I never saw any place of burial for natives—and other conveniences such as the bazaar.

There's a lot one could say about India, and especially about where we were in Baluchistan, on the north-west frontier. Soldiers up there had plenty of time for observation and reflection. Except when doing an occasional twenty-four-hour guard we ceased being what can be called active at noon each day. From then to the cool of the evening we took things easy. In the canteen from 12 noon to the blowing of "cook-house door". After dinner, to sleep ; those who didn't take their midday beer and were unable to sleep could, if they had any money, go and play Crown and Anchor or "house" in the shade between barrack blocks, or shell out in the billiard-room—anything, anywhere, as long as it did not disturb the customary peace of the afternoon in the barrack-room.

In the cool of the evening there were footballs to kick and run with ; gloves in the gym. to box with. There were also little cabs called "gharries" waiting on the road at the end of the parade ground to convey soldiers for next to nothing to where the ladies—one near-white and hundreds near-black to black—waited to oblige for next to nothing. There were inter-company "rugger" football matches some evenings. Our regimental XV were the champions of India, winners of many cups. Our regiment also had the champion boxers of the garrison ; the champion tug-of-war team—walked away with the much heavier artillery team—and in Bandsman Boswell we had the champion cross-country runner of our Army in India.

We also had the most cantankerous goat in India or elsewhere. Our regimental goat had his own valet or "batman", and he, the goat, Taffy the Tenth, led his poor batman a

terrible life. After he—I think it was Micky Powell was Taffy's batman during my time—had groomed Taffy to perfection for his appearance on C.O.'s parade, he would roll in the gravel of the parade ground ; and when he didn't go as far as that he wouldn't stand to attention like the rest of us, but stand twisting his head in an effort to get a mouthful of his own whiskers. Nothing near as tidy a goat as the 1st battalion's goat. Wouldn't march. When we started off on a route march he'd stop at the end of the barrack road leading out on to the major road. From there he wouldn't budge. Still, it was what was to be expected from a foreign mercenary, for he wasn't a Welsh goat—not even a British goat. He came to us, I believe, from some place up in the Alps.

We five thousand British and native soldiers on guard over whatever there was to guard on the north-west frontier never grew anything but our beards, yet we were well and humbly served. From the time the nappy crept in to start shaving us in our beds soon after dawn, to when the untouchables cleaned our latrines after dark, we lorded it—or thought we did—over the native population. The butter, eggs, salad, and Bombay-oyster wallahs we roared at as they cringed before us. But there were those we never had the chance to brow-beat. The hill tribesmen who rarely came down from the hills into Quetta were feared. It wasn't safe to go into the hills, neither was it safe to meddle with the hill tribesmen on the rare occasions when they were shepherded by native police from the foothills down to the bazaar, and back to the foothills again.

Twice I saw bands of them being escorted past our barracks. They were nearer to me, I felt, than the cringing natives who had the freedom of the garrison to sell and to serve. For I was a man from the hills myself, and the hill tribesmen I saw when serving at Quetta reminded me of the way my father from the hills had looked the day he travelled down to the port of Cardiff to fetch me home from the workhouse in which I had landed myself.

I respected those hill tribesmen even after one or more of them had swooped down from the hills to kill my pal, Buck. He was on regimental guard when they swooped down to try and snatch some of our rifles. He must have seen them ; they filled him with slugs before disappearing into the night. Buck died, and was buried with military honours. Quetta wasn't the same to me after Buck was killed.

I did one fort guard after my name had appeared in the list of time-expired men who were to return home on the last boat of a trooping season. Pacing the half-circle of rampart in the heavy middle of the night. Behind me Buck in his grave. This time next week, Buck, I shall be on the big ship we so often talked about. In less than a month I shall be home. You were looking forward to your welcome home to Monmouth Town.

Lifting my eyes to the hills, I wondered where he, or those who had shot Buck were at that moment. Between the foothills and the snowy summits there were several fires, the smoke of which showed black in pale moonlight. Were Buck's slayers seated round one of those fires? Would they be caught and executed? I hoped not—for that would not bring Buck back to join me on the boat for home, back to where his loved ones mourned in old Monmouth Town.

I paced to the end of my half-circle of the rampart to meet the sentry pacing the other half-circle of the fort's rampart. He was an old soldier who had been re-engaged because he was afraid to go home without the regiment. He had had his bounty and spent it on women and drink in Calcutta before returning to the regiment when only half his leave was gone. "But all my money was gone."

I shouldered my loaded rifle, on which my bayonet was fixed, turning about and left him. Somewhere hyenas were squealing and laughing, and there were other middle-night sounds which I had not noticed when guarding the fort on previous occasions. Strange and undefinable sounds from all sides. The black bulk of the fire-spangled hills seemed close, seemed almost close enough to touch with the bayonet that was fixed to the end of my rifle. The vast and mysterious night of India seemed to be closing in on me as the corporal of the guard appeared with my relief.

"S'long, Buck," I murmured as the corporal marched me and the other chap of the old guard back to the guardroom.

"What did you say?" said the old sweat at my side.

"Nothing."



## CHAPTER XIII

### BRAVE NEW BOROUGH

AT Gosport there were people who transferred me to the Army Reserve, gave me a little on account of my deferred pay, and a civilian suit, in which I travelled home by train. I had to change at Cardiff, now a proud city nearly a year old—but I wasn't interested in Cardiff. Merthyr, and my people, 24 miles up into the hills, up there, a thousand feet above Cardiff's sea-level, that's what I was interested in. "Is this the Merthyr train?" "Yes, that's it."

A corner seat, from where I could see bits of Cardiff. When is this train going to start? At last. I bet they've all grown. The letters from home had all been written by Dave for the family, with his own little postscripts for good measure. I had also written a postscript for him, so in a little over four years he, Dave, had through his writings grown nearer, and had become dearer to me than any of my brothers and sisters—two sisters now, for mam's new baby which Dave had told me about in the first letter I received after reaching India was a girl. Since then there had been another new baby, a boy, which made a dozen for our mam, nine of which were alive—Pontypridd. H'm, that looks bigger.

Cilfynydd—how many did dad say had lost their lives in the explosion there? Two hundred and seventy-six. I wonder what's at the theatre this week? I'll be there whatever it is. I haven't seen the inside of a theatre since I left home four years ago— Yes, once at Plymouth. What's our new house like, I wonder? Dave said in the letter that it's got a bath, a parlour— Our mam's in her oil now. Our mam. And our old dad—but he's not so old— Ah, Merthyr Vale. Shan't be long now.

Entering our mam's new house in the new terrace as night came on: "Mam, mam—"

"Johnny fach!"

When the excitement had died down a little our Billa said: "Where did you get that workhouse suit from?"

"What's the matter with it?"

"It's a workhouse suit, that's what's the matter with it. The only people in Merthyr wearing suits like that are those who are in the workhouse."

"Never mind," mam said, "it'll do for you to go to work in."

Then I knew there was something the matter with it. "It'll have to do for me to go to the theatre with you to-night."

"Yes; an' I'll get you a suit from Masters' to-morrow."

After drinking one half-pint just to please dad, I left him to go to see Leonard Boyne in "Raffles". Mam had seen it once that week, but she said she could look at Leonard Boyne more than once or twice.

Next morning she took me to Masters', the clothiers, where she fitted me out. Light boots she bought me in Oliver's. In my new clothes and boots I took a week's holiday before starting back in the pit, and during that week was able to note the progress made during the four years I had been away. The town I had left was now a Borough, with a Labour man, one of Keir Hardie's supporters, as Mayor. Those who in 1837 had first applied for the town's incorporation must have turned in their graves when Enoch Morrell was elected our first Mayor. Dad was proud of the fact. "One of Hardie's men," he said. "They tried to shift Hardie out of his seat whilst you were away. A shipowner from Cardiff came up to stand against him. Might as well have stayed home, for they may as well try to shift that mountain as shift Keir Hardie. He's here for life."

The place looked real twentieth century. Trams and electric light were consolidating their victories over horse-drawn buses and gas light; and motor-cars were beginning to look as if they had come to stay, people who at first had laughed at them were now wondering what the world was coming to.

I had a surprise when seeing the fine new shops, new pubs, and re-built chapels in our main street, which had been widened a little here and there—and the houses that had been built, houses similar to our new house. Better houses, new schools, better water-supply, better everything. The upland metropolis of Wales, the first great outpost of the industrial revolution in Wales, was at last a place fit to live as well as work in. All sorts of things had happened whilst I was in Africa and India. A great revival had swept the district almost clean of sin for a short while, the special revival hymns of the previous year were still being sung, and the name of

the revivalist, Evan Roberts, was often heard, though the man himself was in quiet seeking recovery after the emotional strain of too many revival meetings.

Florence Smithson, whom I had known and so often spoken to during the years I was a member of the front-of-the-house staff of her father's theatre, was now a London musical play star. She was being referred to as "the sweet singer of old Drury", and Merthyr theatre-goers were looking forward to the time when she would visit our town and sing for us in her father's theatre. Hearing this about "Florrie", as I had called her, made me think about her age; and my own. Of course, I shall be twenty-three next birthday. Then Florrie's twenty-four, for I remember her telling me one night—Or is she twenty-five next birthday? But what does it matter?

I came back to find young men of our town in preparation for future tasks, young men such as Henry Seymour Berry—"Seymour" we always called him—and his two brothers, who were just beginning to make a mark, beginning to get on to and into things.

High up above the town the new recreation ground with its new Boer War memorial; the Hospital's new wing; new billiard saloons for young colliers and steelworkers to spend non-alcoholic nights in; a new English kind of Rugby football, which we called "Northern Union", beginning to find favour. Everything new and twentieth century. Our Welsh champion cyclists, Jimmy Michael and Linton and others after new records; our choirs, under the inspiration of Harry Evans and his successor, E. T. Davies, tackling new works, leaving the "Elijah" and the "Messiah" alone for a bit, giving them a rest whilst we tried our voices on oratorios which might be old to others but new to us who had for so long stuck to the two favourites. Soon after my arrival home I joined E. T. Davies's choir in time to take part in his presentation of the "Hymn of Praise", with Lloyd Chandos and Edith Evans as soloists. Lloyd Chandos—oh, what a tenor. All silk, his voice was, yet he could make it ring the bell when required.

All this extension and expansion of life during my four years' absence hit me and slightly dazed me, for it was almost unbelievable. Dave in his letters from home had not prepared me for it, confining himself to matters affecting our family. So it seemed that I had gone to sleep one night to wake up next morning in a hometown which had changed overnight into something like a modern town. What I mean is that it was no longer merely the living quarters around the works, but now



had a life of its own—well, you know what I mean. Dad and his generation after work went to the pub to talk about work and nothing but work. Those of his generation who went not to the pub, but to chapel, talked about work and seldom anything but work on their way to chapel and on the way home from chapel. Now the people had so many things other than work to talk about, so work and the works and the pits were forgotten and seldom referred to during our leisure-time in the first expansive decade of the twentieth century. Anything but work we talked about. About our champion boxers, Freddie Welsh, Jim Driscoll, Tom Thomas; about our great new style preachers; our new school of conductors, trained in colleges; about the new musical shows presented at the theatre; about the new turns presented each week at the Temperance Hall, now a twice-nightly variety house. “Work? Who dares talk about work now that we’re from it?” But let’s get back to the house, and the family.

Mam showed me *her* front-room, her bathroom, and the three large bedrooms, two of which took two beds easy. “Something like a house at last, Johnny.” At last. How proud of it she was. She was stouter, had more poise—if that’s the right word for it—than she had when we lived in the other two little houses. More of a mistress, or manageress, under whom Blodwen, by this time sweet seventeen, worked and tended on dad and the boys. Mam had plenty to do—“and room to do it in, thank God”—with dad and four of us boys to send off to work every morning, and to get ready for by the time we came home earlier than was the case before I joined the Army.

Dad’s hair was a bit thinner, otherwise he was much the same as when I left home. As good a workman as ever, and as fond of his pint as ever. It was my brothers I found changed. Billa and Frank, men of the new era, worked stalls of their own in the pit, earning as much, often more, than dad earned. After work they dressed in a way which made them look like gentlemen of leisure who had been turned out by most exacting valets. Each of them, in order to remove the last tiny speck of coal-dust from the difficult place under their eyes, applied sometimes best butter, sometimes cream. Fine linen they wore, and well-cut suits. Patent leather boots or shoes. They went not to the pub, but to the dance, the stalls in the theatre, or for a game of billiards. They wrinkled their noses when they returned home late at night to find dad jolly after a few pints. As for me—at first they regarded me as a sort

of released prisoner from some place not civilized. With a faint smile on their faces they went on fixing their crush ties as I answered dad or Dave's questions about India or Africa. Presently they took me in hand, introduced me to their tailor. They sighed as they said : " You shouldn't have let our mam put you into that reach-me-down. Of course, mam's always gone there for our clothes when we were kids, but now—well, look at it." The tailor shook his head sadly before taking my measurements for something more twentieth century.

Then they took me to get a cycle from where they had got theirs made special, special dropped-handles, that's all. Took me to dances when the suit was finished and I was fit to be seen in their company. Introduced me to other young people of their set, their day and generation, in which I seemed rather old-fashioned, or er—well, I don't know. Couldn't have fitted in very well, for Billa and Frank lost interest in me and left me to make my own way.

Dave, who worked with dad, was too young to take his place with the young men, followed me around with eyes, mouth and ears open. For four years he had been thinking of me, and of little else but me. He had kept all my letters—had I kept all those he had written ? No, none of them. His disappointment was obvious. Did I get the handkerchiefs he had bought out of his pocket-money to send me ? Yes—didn't I write to say so ? No. Well, I got 'em all right. Got 'em now ? No, the dhobi—that's the chap who washed our clothes in India—didn't bring 'em back from the wash. Oh. Never mind, I'll buy you a couple more. You don't want to buy handkerchiefs for me now that I'm home. Oh. No. He and the two boys still at school, and our little Mary Jane who hadn't started school, were my worshippers, but I was Dave's special idol. Then there were the relations.

" You'd better go round all of 'em that lives in the district," mam said, " for you know how they'll be if you don't. Your uncle Harry've had his leg off—but I think Dave told you in the letter. Then your uncle John—not my brother John, but your father's brother John—have lost a leg too—or was it before you joined the Army he lost his leg ? Anyway, go an' see him, poor fellow. And your auntie Saran—she've got three children now, an' your auntie Liza've got two. Seems only yesterday they was living with us in Cross Row an' working in the brick-yard. Your auntie Moriah—she was always asking about you—is gone to live on the Brecon Road now, so it's no use you go to where she used to live on the Glebeland. Did Dave tell you

in the letter about your cousin Ike, your auntie Marged's boy, running away from home? Well, she's heard from him now, from somewhere in Canada, where he's living now after being all over the world on ships. Then your uncle Harry's oldest boy, same name as you, remember, is out that way somewhere. Mexico is out that way, I believe? Yesterday your uncle Daniel and uncle Thomas was asking your father when you was coming to . . ."

Two days it took me to round them all up, for some of them were not at home when I first called. They were all surprised to find that I had grown. "Never our Saran's Johnny," they said. They called the neighbours out to see "our Saran's Johnny who've been out in Africa an' India". "But that man is never your Saran's Johnny," said the neighbours. "Not little Johnny who used to be carrying the basket for Thomas the butcher, an' selling in the theatre."—"It is."—"Why, he's as big as his father."—"Bigger than his father." Auntie Moriah wouldn't believe her eyes. I was never the baby she had nursed, never "our Saran's Johnny". All of them spoke of me as "*our* Saran's Johnny".

Having been re-acclimatized, and having visited all my relations, I went back to my work in the pit. Started in a place of my own, but not in the thin Gellideg seam. Having for over four years had the privilege of standing upright, I was not disposed to crawl about in a twenty-three-inch coal seam again. As a matter of fact I was not in the least keen about going down into the darkness of the pit after four years spent in the sunshine, but what else was there to do?

The expansion, extension and improvement that had taken place during my absence above ground was not so noticeable underground. True, the period of scientific management had commenced, and instead of the old, almost illiterate contractors and overmen who had up to the birth of the century bossed and b\*\*\*\*\*d us about, there were young and hustling certificated mine-managers. Many of them miners' sons who whilst working in the pits attended night-schools before leaving the pits to be finished off in mining-schools. Now, dressed in classy mining-suits with cap to match, and special high-power safety-lamps in hand, they hurried around introducing new methods of working. *Working*. They were keen on *output* per man per shift, were these new certificated mine-managers, much keener than the old happy-go-lucky, uncertificated overmen had ever been.

It was the new day of the new *certificated* man. Mining ;



teaching—everything. "Go to night-school, young man." Not having gone I slogged away from morning to the end of each shift for a couple of pounds a week. My work on measuring-days was measured up by the new certificated manager, who would laugh heartily when I suggested that they should allow me something for the bad roof on my working-place, or the stiffness of the coal there. They would, instead of the allowance I asked for and felt I was entitled to, treat me to a short lecture on how to get the most out of a working-place. Talked to me of "output per manshift" and "prop-pressure" and a lot more they had learnt from the mining text-books. Wanted to know how it was that they were only getting four tons of coal per day from a place capable, if properly worked, of yielding at least six.

"Don't talk so daft," was my reply.

"We're not talking daft," they would say. "Taking the output per man throughout this district—after making allowances for variations and abnormalities—we find that it falls far short of the maximum which must be established and maintained. What you men do not appear to realize is that this company has to compete against other companies for markets——"

"Oh, get to hell out of here !"

But it would have paid me better to have held my tongue and let them talk themselves out, same as dad let them. "Let 'em show off if they want to, son. They've been to them places, got them stifficates—an' they must let us know that they've got 'em. So let 'em talk. I listens to 'em, 'an after they've finished I say that I know they're right, and that I hope they'll put a bit of 'lowance in for me. An' I generally gets it." I didn't.

In the working-place below mine there was an I.L.P.'er, who used to laugh when I gave vent to my feelings about the new tight-fisted officials who measured our work up on measuring-days. When we had our mid-shift break to eat, this I.L.P.'er would laugh at me and say : "It's no use getting your hair off, and think that these chaps are worse than the old bosses in the pits. For they're not, a different method, that's all. More scientific. Got to be, for they're up against scientific Socialism, for one thing. Can't blame these chaps for running around trying to make us bust ourselves, for look at the number we've got to keep. In the old days it used to be just a half-dozen families, the Crawshays, the Guests and the rest. Now it's boards of directors and thousands of shareholders—— You ought to come to some of our meetings, an' hear some of our speakers. Then you'd know . . ."

But it was not to I.L.P. meetings I went after my day's work was done. There were four years to be made up for, four years when the sight of a white girl was breathtaking, four years without a theatre, or anything that made life so worth-while as I was now finding it. I.L.P. meetings, indeed! Not me. My week's leisure-time was already fully occupied. Monday—theatre. Tuesday—choir practice. Wednesday—maybe a dance. Thursday, which was early-closing day—take one of the living-in shop-girls for a walk, if wet, to Temperance Hall or Theatre. Friday—work late to earn additional few shillings to spend over the week-end following the one coming. Saturday—either Theatre or Temperance Hall again. Sunday, after long sleep of the week, for a walk in the afternoon, if fine, if not shelter in shop doorway talking to the boys whilst keeping an eye on passing girls. Sunday evening—to chapel, generally to Park Chapel, where Dan (bach) Davies led the singing in a way as met with my complete approval. He also, most Sundays, had a soloist to present. There was also a sermon, which we suffered for the sake of the singing. After chapel, promenade through the crowded main street, where the girls were glorious in their Sunday clothes. So my evenings were all booked with man-about-town duties which left me no time for I.L.P. meetings.

On the Saturday before August Bank Holiday I told mam that I was taking an eight-day holiday.

"What?" dad cried. "Eight days' holiday. Something I never had at your age."

"Well, it's something we're going to have," said Billa, who was going to Blackpool, I believe. I was cycling with about a dozen other chaps to Builth Wells, the little mid-Wales spa to which colliers went to get an annual clearing-out of the coal-dust swallowed during the year. A seven-day night and morning course of the Saline water was supposed to clear a collier out as clean as a whistle, but it wasn't for that I cycled there. There were attractions in addition to the waters racking, purging and soothing. Lovely country, a clean, unpolluted river, home-made bread and home-cured bacon, impromptu concerts in the moonlight. Girls on holiday who liked a bit of fun—so I was told by chaps who had been at Builth Wells the year previous.

I found a girl there, but she wasn't a visitor. She lived there, had always lived there. In a little shop, in that little town. Her father died before he was forty, she told me, and grown-up sisters followed him to the graveyard of St. Mary's Church.

Only her mother left, and one sister, to look after. They were both dying, the mother and sister, but Laura herself looked well. In her company my man-about-town talk seemed out of place. She was lively in a way, but she was not artificial, as my talk was. She sobered me down.

In less than a year after we had first met, her mother, to whom I had never even spoken, died. Then I asked Laura to marry me, to let me look after her and her only living sister. Before she would say yes she insisted on meeting our mam, so I arranged for her to come to Merthyr for a week, leaving her sister Elizabeth to look after the little house and shop. I arranged for her to sleep at my aunt Marged's, for there was no sleeping accommodation at our house. Mam said she would have to have her food at our house, and she had everything ready on the table when I got back from the station with Laura. All the family stayed in to welcome her—or to see what she was like.

Laura was calling our mam "mother"; and our mam was calling Laura "my gel", before they had been long in each other's company. That night I took Laura to the theatre, which was a bit of an eye-opener for her after living in the country all her life. It was an opera week, and "Maritana" was that night's opera. We had seats in the front row of the three-shilling circle. Wonderful, Laura thought it. "Before you go back I'm going to take you to Cardiff to see something more wonderful still," I promised her. After I had left her with my aunt Marged, where she could have a bedroom to herself for the week, I hurried home to catch our mam before she went to bed. I found her hanging our pit-clothes round about the fire.

"What do you think of her, mam?"

"A nice gel, my boy, a very nice gel. No old nonsense—an' your father thinks she's a nice gel too."

"I'm glad—I'm not going to work Thursday, taking her down to Cardiff to the New Theatre."

"That's right, my boy."

After dinner at our mam's on the Thursday, Laura and I went by train to Cardiff. As soon as we got there I took her along to see the Barracks I had stayed at for a time, but she was not interested much; neither was I, and why I took her there is what I don't know.

After showing her around Cardiff, now striving to justify its recent elevation to city status by widening streets and rushing up new buildings, we had the best money could buy to eat at



some place. Then we went to see "Miss Hook of Holland" at the New Theatre, which was another eye-opener for Laura.

We were married in Builth Wells Church the following March, and Laura and her sister left Builth Wells to settle down in Merthyr Tydfil, where my work was. But her sister didn't stay long, for she was taken ill, and the doctor said that if we wanted to keep her alive, then she would have to go and live somewhere where there was less smoke than there was in Merthyr. So she went back to Builth Wells to live with her aunt Annie.

So there was only me and Laura in the house until our Dave, who was always following me about, asked if he should come and stay with us.

"You ask mam about that," I told him.

"Have him, name of goodness," mam said when I told her that Dave was bothering me to let him come and stay with us. "Through him writing you all the time you was in the army he's soft about you. So have him. I'll still have plenty to look after; and it's not a stranger he's leaving me for."

"Sure you don't mind, mam?"

"Mind, indeed. Why should I? I know Laura'll look after him as well as I can."

So Dave packed his things and carried them down to the house me and Laura had started our married life in, a house in Park Place, a couple of hundred yards above the theatre. We didn't stay there long because of the noise of the trams, which used to make the house tremble a little as they clanked by our door; so we moved to a new house in Milton Place.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IS THIS HE . . . ?

L AURA's baby was expected about the end of December or the beginning of January, and things were going well with us when I lost my senses. Must have been out of my mind. A nice little home ; a wife much too good for me ; regular work ; and our Dave living with us to keep us company. Good company he was. He was in his eighteenth year, and as handsome a boy as one could see anywhere. He worked as regularly as I did, but not in the same pit.

When things were going so well as this, something happened. It started this way. On my way home from the pit with a chap, he talks of a new club which had been recently opened by a bookmaker who had once worked near me in Cwm pit. He was a poor and hard-working collier then, now he was a wealthy bookmaker. This club—it was no club. The name was a cloak for a gambling-den, I was to find. This chap told me that there were nightly faro games at which hundreds of pounds changed hands—

“Faro? What sort of a game is that? A card game?”

“Of course. Don't they play faro in the army?”

“I never seen it played.”

He went on to explain the game of faro, then went on to say that he was going to the club that evening. “If you'd like to come along,” he said, “I shall be on the corner near the Belle Vue about ha'-past seven.”

“Not me.”

Yet I went with him to the place. He knocked at a door in a way he said I should remember—“for the doorman won't open to any other knock”. The door was opened by the doorman. “Pal o' mine,” said the chap who had invited me, and whom I followed up a stairway into a big barn of a place with a stove and a sort of bar behind which there were a few bottles of mineral water on shelves. At long tables men were playing cards, but nine-tenths of those present were crowded around the man who was drawing a faro bank. I stood watch-

ing the chap who had brought me plunging into the thick of the money-mad crowd to add a piece of silver to one of the heaps covering the faces of eight cards. He won ; won again—and again ; turned and smiled at me.

As the Jew "drawing the bank" went on shuffling the cards for the next "draw", the chap who had secured my admission to the place whispered to me : "The bank's going bad, now's the time to punt." I followed his lead ; and left the place winning between three and four pounds ; the chap who had taken me there had won seven pounds. "Better than working underground," he suggested. I agreed. "And the bit we've won is nothing." He named men who had "worked" a shilling up to a tenner in a night ; plungers who had beat the bank for fifty quid in an hour—

"What time do they start drawing the bank there ?"

"Usually as soon as the result of the last race is through." I had noticed the telephone. "Then they start drawing."

"Are you going to work to-morrow ?"

He laughed. "What, now that the luck's with me. To-morrow I'm going to work to-night's winnings up to fifty." I decided to do the same.

"Where have you been until this time ?" said Laura.

I told her some lie.

Next day I lost what I had won, and a few pounds of my own money, or rather Laura's and her sister's money. For she had her own home, and there was a couple of hundred pounds got for the Builth Wells house and shop, half of which Laura got, and all of which I gambled away before starting to pawn all that was pawnable of her home. I made Dave my unwilling accomplice in the robbing of her home. Pawned all her wedding-presents, even the sewing-machine. All in less than two months, two months during which I hardly ever ate food more than once a day. I pawned my own clothes and hers. Told her lie upon lie, for she was easy to deceive, being from the country. I borrowed all I could, told our mam a lie about Laura wanting five pounds to send to Builth Wells to Lizzie until she received from Builth some money that was owing her. Got the five pounds—lost it. Same trick on my brothers Billa and Frank ; tricked my aunt Marged out of a few pounds. The last thing to go was Laura's wedding ring. Having pawned that and lost the money I hung about the club—club, be damned !—till midnight, until I was thrown out. Dave, my shadow, my dupe, my tool, followed me home—home ?—from the place of the damned.



Our mam was there with Laura, who had cried herself ugly. A sight she looked, with her swollen tear-soddened face and her bulging body. I stood in the doorway, Dave behind me in the passage. I was afraid to go nearer, for there was that in our mam's face——

"Well, John?" she said. "Are you satisfied?"

I didn't speak—couldn't.

"You're a dirty s\*\*\*, that's what you are, John," she said; and I knew that when that word left her mouth that I was nothing more in her eyes. "I could forgive you if it was to me you had done what you have; but it's to this gel, with her baby coming and a dying sister on her hands that you've done it. You've done for yourself, John—— Don't cry, my lovely gel. I'll see you through your time, then you shall take all he's left you to take back to Builth with you. You can make him pay towards you and your baby—— Don't cry, lovely gel. He's my son, worse luck, but he's not worth a tear from you——"

"Now, mam——"

"Shut up, you, you—— No, I won't dirty my lips. Don't you ever darken my door again, John. I'll see that this poor gel shan't want, but as for you—no, not a mouthful of chewed bread or a drop of water would I give you. Go to them that you've taken this poor gel's money to, or to the pawnshop you've taken her things to." She pushed me aside on her way out. "I've paid the two months' rent you told this gel you'd paid, so she'll have shelter when her time comes. Good night, lovely gel. Try not to cry any more, please, for you'll only do harm to yourself and the little one on the way."

She went, Laura following her to the front door. Dave stood looking at me with contempt in his eyes. I opened my mouth in an effort to say something to our mam before she left me to do what I felt inclined to do, the only decent thing to do. But I couldn't speak. . . . Choked . . . Swallowing—swaying—"Eh?"

"There's some food in the pantry your mother brought," Laura was saying flatly, as though through a telephone or something.

A few days later our baby was born. A boy. I saw him twice before Laura took him away to Builth, but each time our mam was there stiffening Laura against me. The second time—and the last time before she went to Builth—I saw Laura and the baby, was in the empty house after all the furniture and things had been carried out by the van-men and Dave

and Blodwen and our mam. Laura had her wedding-ring which I had pawned on to go back to where I had brought her from. Our mam had made Dave give her all the pawn-tickets, and she had redeemed the wedding-ring for Laura to wear back home. Mam was taking Laura and her baby up to her house to have a bit to eat before taking her to catch the train back to Builth.

"As for you two," mam said, looking at me and our Dave, "it won't pay you to come near my house, for I'd brain the pair of you. Come on, my gel."

She sent the key of the house back to the landlord, Blodwen took it, and took Laura and her baby away from my sight. Homeless before I had been married a year. I began to laugh, standing there on the pavement in front of the empty house with our Dave. "What are you laughing for?" said Dave. I laughed and laughed—till I began to cry. "Don't make a show for people," said Dave. "Come on." "Where?" "Anywhere, anywhere from here." He led me away.

Only the one shabby, shiny suit in which I stood. Rest in pawn. When did I work last? That day, over two months ago, when that chap told me about the club. My tools in the pit, they'd fetch something if only I could get them up out of the pit— Yes, it was a good hatchet—paid nine-shillin' for it. Then the mandrills, sledge, wedges, shovels, long bar— Yes, should get at least a half-sovereign for as much as I could carry up out of the pit. Then with that half-sovereign I could go to the club, and if only I had a bit of luck I might work it up to a tenner—fifty quid, with which I would get all Laura's things out of pawn and—"Dave!"

But Dave only laughed when I suggested going to the pit for the tools. "Most of 'em broken or blunted or taken by this time." We walked about. Once we tried the club, but the doorman said no. We were a nuisance, a penniless nuisance. We walked about. Dave went somewhere whilst I stood on corners in my shabby shiny suit, and Dave had food in paper when he returned. I can't eat. But you must eat. Must I? Of course. Where did you get this food? From bopa. What do you think she said? What? Said that she didn't mind giving me a bit to eat now that I had—ha, ha, "left that Johnny to travel the rest of the way to hell by himself." Why don't you? Eat some of this grub. Dave? What? What name did they call Laura's baby? I don't know—eat some of this grub.

That first night after Laura had taken the baby away, me and Dave slept in the empty house, into which we got through the window of the back-kitchen. It was cold the second week in January ; but there was about a bucket of small coal in the cwtch, and there was a big packing-case left over. So Dave made a fire. Next night the same ; but there was no coal or stick the third night. " I'm not having any more of this," said Dave, when the five o'clock hooter blew. " I'm going up to mam's for a warm. Coming ? "

Dad and the boys had left for work when we got to mam's, and we could see from where we stood outside the back-kitchen window, could see our mam sitting down having a cup of tea by herself. Dave knocked at the door. " It's us," Dave said, when she opened the door. With her head she motioned Dave in. " Go, John," she said, " before I fetch the poker to brain you." I went, for I knew she would do it. Our mam finished with me. Laura, Lizzie, our Dave now, all—all finished with me. I went back to the empty house, back to the room where Laura's baby was born. How long ago ? Laura . . .

The early-morning hooter, the first of many morning hooters, was blowing again. How did I get here ? It was a brickyard. Having a warm. Girls came laughing through the gates ; but it was a man who said : " Here, this is not a casual ward or a fourpenny kip. Clear out before . . ." Some of the girls laughed as I went. Laura . . .

I started walking, not about any more, but towards Laura. The rain never stopped, and a cold rain it was. Neither did I stop. The rain washed the top of the Beacons, the lonely heights. Down into Brecon Town, where someone said " My God, what a state you're in ! Come on in so as I can shut the door." Strangers fed me there before I left the warmth of the little house to complete the journey to Laura. From Merthyr to Laura was forty-two miles, the first half of which was behind me. There was a tramp sheltering in a roadside outbuilding open to the road, and in which there was a farmer's cart. Got a match, mate ? No. Where you bound for ? To Laura. Laura . . .

It was getting dark, and out of the blurred wet twilight the trees rose to individuality to ask me where I was bound for. Bare, inquisitive trees, each bending their heads as I approached to ask where I was bound for. To Laura, I told them.

At last the river, the river along which—— Where in Builth is she living ? Old Miss Grocock would know.



"Why, Jack," cried Miss Grocock after she had looked twice to make sure who it was.

"Laura?" I said, holding on to the door-frame.

"I'll fetch her." She helped me in.

Laura came running, and as soon as I saw her face I knew that I was all right now. She undressed me and put me to bed in her other nightdress. There was the baby in the bed sleeping. "Isn't he lovely?" Laura said. "Don't go to sleep until you have the hot soup I'm hotting-up for you." She made me take every drop of the hot soup before she allowed me to lie back. Sleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and I had the bed to myself now. Where was I? Sitting up in bed I noticed the nightdress I was wearing. Laura. Getting out of bed and out on to the landing when I heard women's voices below.

"... waster, that's what he is ..."

"He's my husband, whatever he is."

"... came, looking worse than any tramp——"

The cry of a baby.

"Not only to you, but to the baby as well ..."

"Even his own people won't have anything to do with him, so why should you take him back?"

"He's my husband when all's said and done."

"Husband, indeed! Laura, I've no patience ..."

Back to the bedroom to dress, but where are my clothes. Shout down for them? No, not now whilst that lot are there. What will Laura do? Again I slept, and woke to find Laura, with the baby in her arms, smiling down on me. "You've had a good sleep."

"Grand—— Let me have the baby a minute."

"After you've dressed; I've dried and brushed your clothes."

"Are they gone?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Oh, I heard 'em at you to turn me out."

"We'll talk about that after you've had dinner."

"Dinner? As late as that."

After dinner we talked things over. The house which Laura's aunt had taken for her was a shelter which it was up to me to make a home of. Lizzie, who was extremely ill, wanted to come from where she was staying with the aunt to Laura, but the aunt, fearing for her now that I had followed Laura to Builth, would not allow Lizzie to come to Laura until—well, until she was assured that the girl would not be worried

into her grave faster than she was going by such a scamp as the aunt believed me to be.

"Will she let Lizzie come to you if I find work?"

"Here in Builth, do you mean?"

"This is where you are—and the baby—isn't it?"

"But there are no pits here; and pit-work's the only work you're used to, isn't it?"

"I'm off out to find something."

"Something" that was little better than nothing as far as wages went was what I did find. Having failed to find anything in the town I went to where they were felling timber in a wood outside the town. Bark-strippers were required. An old man and his three sons had the contract for felling and hauling and bark-stripping. I went up to the eldest of the three sons, who was using an oilstone on an axe. "How about a job bark-stripping, boss?" He laughed.

"Bark-stripping's only a boy's job, and it's boys wages we pays. No man——"

"When can I start?"

"In the morning if it's any good to you."

For twelve shillings and tenpence per week I stripped bark off trees in a wood. In the coalfield I had earned more in a day than I was now earning in a week. Morning and evening I passed through the town on my way to and from the woods. The boss of the timber-falling job allowed us bark-strippers to carry home as much firing as we could. I preferred a one-piece log that I could saw into blocks at night. With a two hundred-weight log on my shoulder I passed through the main street of Builth Wells, my trousers "yorked-up" and my clothes all muddy. My progress through the street was slow, slow enough to enable me to hear the comments of those who remembered me as one of the town's most "la-di-da" young visitors.

"Isn't that Laura Evans' husband?" "That's him."

"What a spec' he is." "Yes, isn't he; and do you remember how he used to do the grand?" "Don't I, though. At that dance in the Assembly Rooms he . . ."

Couldn't help hearing it all, but it didn't chafe me, for as with the tool in my hands I stripped the bark off the trees, my mind stripped away whatever pride there was left about me. When the bark-stripping finished, I tackled a job on a building in the main street, where I was "on show" carrying the hod for most of the day. Earning a little over a pound a week now, earning it in fear and trembling, for I could never overcome the fear of a pitman when carrying a hod *up* a ladder.

Down into the bowels of the earth half a mile pitmen don't mind in the least, but to carry a hod up a ladder to the second story of a building does in most cases put the wind up them. Still, the money was good for Builth. It was also August, and Laura had let all the beds to visitors ; we slept on the floor of the attic for that fortnight, after which Lizzie came to us.

After I had written to tell our mam how we were getting on, the things I had pawned began reaching us one by one until they were all back where they belonged. Mam redeemed them every one. And an occasional letter from Dave to let us know how the family was getting on. Billa married ; Frank married, to a girl who was a staunch Catholic ; Blodwen courting strong ; Merthyr much the same as when you were here ; " Best love from all at home, Dave."

From one job to another with hardly a day's break, for I turned my hand to anything and everything, took whatever I could get to do until something better offered. Low wages most of the time, but I was fairly happy with timber-fellers, navvies on roadmaking, and making the new Builth cattle-market, with bridge-building gangs on the railway—anything as long as it was a job. I was reading a little, the Bible mostly, from which I read a chapter of the Old and a chapter of the New Testament most evenings before going to my bed.

Lizzie was with us, in bed most of the time. On fine Sundays I would hire a chair to wheel her out in, and we talked about Laura who was not going about much for she was expecting another baby. Lizzie and I now better friends than ever. She died when our second baby was eight days old, died without fuss or pain. We were with her, Laura sitting down holding her second baby ; Miss Grocock near the head of the bed ; I was at the foot of the bed, standing, smiling at Lizzie. " Jack," she murmured.

I moved nearer to her. " Yes, Lizzie."

" You'll be good to Laura, won't you ?"

" Yes," I said. She smiled up at me trustingly, I thought, before she closed her eyes. She was gone. Miss Grocock nodded her head, pulled the sheet over Lizzie's face as I fell on my knees and put my arms around Laura and the baby. Laura cried a little, and said that I was all she had in the world now.

We stayed in Builth Wells until our third baby, a girl, was born, then we moved back down to the coalfield ; but not back to Merthyr, for I was afraid of the gambling fever which I had caught there. So into the Monmouthshire part of the coal-



field we went, and we lived near Pontypool, and I got work on the night-shift at the Llanerch pit. We hadn't been there long before our Dave came across to us from Merthyr. He brought his pit-clothes, but no pit-boots. "They'd gone," he explained as he unpacked, "not worth bringing over." Yet he had no money with which to buy a pair of pit-boots; neither did I have the money to lend him until he drew his first pay.

We managed, though, for he got a job on the day-shift; and being as I was on the night-shift, we were able to meet in the wood which was about half-way between where we lived and the pit at which we both worked on different shifts. Had he waited for me to reach home, he would not have time to get to the pit in time to get down before coal-winding commenced. So we had to meet and change boots in the wood, where he took off his patent-leather evening shoes and put on my heavy pit-boots, in which he hurried away to his work in the pit; whilst I hurried home in his walking-out shoes, "tea-drinkers", as we called 'em. For a fortnight we had to do this, because what with the week-in-hand system of paying, and my pay not being sufficient to meet the extra cost of a new pair of pit-boots for him, it was two weeks before he could buy them himself. In a way it was laughable, this one pair of pit-boots working double shift for a fortnight. Of course he was back home with them hours before I wanted them for the night-shift, for between his shift and mine there was the middle, afternoon shift. "What if our Ike came across from Merthyr and got a job on the afternoon shift to make these boots work the clock round?" said Dave laughingly, as he took 'em off one afternoon.

Out of his first pay he bought himself a pair of new pit-boots, but he didn't stay long enough with us to wear them out, for there was a girl in Merthyr, who was training to be a hospital nurse, that he loved, and who loved him. So he went back to Merthyr.

Laura and I and the children went across to Merthyr, taking the three children with us, as soon as we were able to afford the time and money for train-fare. Both of us were dying to see our mam.

"Well, John?" she said.

"Here I am, mam."

"And your family. Three lovely children, my gel. Let me have the baby a minute—this is the gel, isn't it? What's her name?"

"Mary Elizabeth, after my mother and Lizzie."

"Of course. Take her till I put food for you all; then

after p'raps we'll all go to the threatre. What do you say, John?"

I was too full up to say anything. There she was, putting food for us, talking as if there had been nothing, not a cross word, ever between us. Then the way Laura was looking at her—— No, I couldn't say anything.

## CHAPTER XV

### THERE AND BACK

JUST when we were settling down nicely in our new home near Pontypool, the War came. My army reserve pay of sixpence per day, paid quarterly, had come in most useful during the years of struggle at Builth Wells, but I never dreamt that I would be called upon to do something for it. Furthermore, I was under the impression that I had drawn my last penny of reserve pay, and that I was free, which evidently was not the case, for I was called to the colours with all the other reservists. Must have forfeited service up to the time I deserted in Africa.

Anyway, go I had to. We had been looking forward to spending the August Bank Holiday at Merthyr with mam, but the talk of war and the call to war put the tin hat on that.

"It won't be long before it's over," I kept on saying to Laura, without comforting her much. She hardly knew a soul, and here was I about to leave her amongst strangers. The woman next door, Mrs. Hawkins, seemed a decent sort from what little we had seen of her, so I slipped to ask her to come and stay with Laura for a few minutes after I had left. "Certainly," she said. "Mr. Jones off for a bit of a outing," she was saying as I hurried away.

At Pontypool railway station I helped to crowd the platform. Reservists, scores of 'em, waiting for the Newport train. Women and children seeing them off, quite a jolly crowd, with an anxious face here and there. Couldn't see any of my old comrades, most of whom would no doubt be boarding trains in the adjoining county of Glamorganshire. Yet Taylor and Houlder had told me they lived at—— or was it near Pontypool? The train steamed in.

"Mind to write——"—"Don't forget what I told you about next week's pay. Pay the boy sixteen shillings an' a tanner for himself, an' tell him to look after my tools until——"—"You'll get her an out-patient's ticket from——"—"An' send



me half-a-quid out of it to the address I'll write from——” —“ Now don't you worry your head about me, who's never died a winter yet——” —“ Come along, please.” —“ Keep your hair on, butt——” —“ Right away, guard.” —“ Don't for—— See you — what I told you — Christmas at the latest. Goo'bye-ee.”

Reservists waiting on the down-platform of every station were hailed by those on the look-out for them from the train as it steamed in. “ Dick, come on in here—plenty o' room —Dick's my old 'listing-chum . . .” Re-unions at every station to Newport, where there were meetings and partings. Reservists on all platforms and crossing the bridge over platforms. “ Here, porter, what's the game. I asked one of you chaps where the train for the 'Shot started from, an' he sent me over the bridge. Then another one of your chaps sends me back over the bridge. If you think——”

“ Cardiff train.”

At Cardiff, as I left the station to take a tram to the Depot, someone cried : “ Hullo, Joney, my old flower !” It was Jimmy Price, the junior partner of what the senior partner, Jack Smith, had in Quetta called “ the old firm ”, the Crown and Anchor game. Here was Pricey, in civilians, merry. “ Come an' have a drink wi' me.”

“ Up in the Depot canteen after we've reported, if you like.” I wanted to write to Laura again.

“ Good enough, we'll meet some of the other boys up there.”

We did, the canteen was heaving with 'em. Spud Murphy, Big Kiley, Darkie Rees, Tiny Thomas, Ginger Jones—and on top of a form with his eyes shut our Welsh-speaking Macnamara was singing the song I had heard him sing years before in Africa and India. It was his favourite song—but he was a useful boxer. Yet he would sing :

“ It's an empty sleeve, yes, an empty sleeve,  
Telling its daring story,  
For the arm was cleft, and the arm was left,  
On a field of British glo-o-ory.  
But I don't grieve, for this empty sleeve,  
It's only our foes that grieve—  
For many an empty saddle, my lads,  
Was the price of this empty sleeve.”

He opened his eyes to acknowledge the applause of the few who were drinking with him, and who cried : “ Good old Mac'. Now, altogether, lads : ‘ It's an emp——, ’”

He stopped leading the singing to take part in a dispute over beer which had disappeared during the owner's absence out in the urinal. "Are you trying to say that *I* drunk your beer?" "I said that whilst I was out having——" "You said I drunk your beer." "I said no such thing, but as the cap seems to fit, you can blurry-well wear it." "Why, you——"

"Now, none o' that," cried the canteen sergeant.

"Keep the ring, give 'em room to get at it," cried Macnamara.

I hurried out and away to the barrack-room to write Laura.

After we had been fitted out we marched out of the Depot late at night to entrain for we knew not where for certain. Many of the chaps were drunk marching through the city of Cardiff that night, the inside couple of my section of fours, Big Kiley and Pricey, were full as eggs; and there were many others who staggered along from the Depot to the railway station through streets lined with citizens who cried: "Give it to 'em boys." For the first time the citizens of Cardiff turned out to cheer me and the likes o' me. I had spent some time in the place when it was a town, and when the townspeople took no more notice of me and the likes o' me than they took of a stray dog. Evidently it needs a war to elevate a soldier in the mind of the people he is going to fight for. "Give it to 'em, boys."

"Too blurry true we will," said Big Kiley, as he staggered along; and the citizens, who not so long ago would have wrinkled their noses at the sight of a man in the state Kiley was in, laughed out loud and broke the ranks to pat him on the back and stuff fags in his hand. "Give it to 'em, boys." "Too blurry true we will."

As the next day was breaking we reached Bordon, Hants, where our regiment's 2nd battalion was waiting for us reservists to make it up to fighting strength. I was posted with others to B company, commanded by Captain (Bubbles) Berkeley, with Captain Haggard as his next senior. We paraded a few times, had one day's training before being sent to France as soft as butter, us reservists were. But the general who spoke to us the morning we left Bordon said he was sure we would give a good account of ourselves. He was right—in a way.

So in less than a week after leaving Laura and the children I was being "concentrated" on an upland stretch of country not far from Havre, from where we were marched to some-

where else. The officers may have had a rough idea where we kept going to, but we chaps, well, us reservists didn't. All we knew was that the donkey's load we had been loaded with was crippling us, strangling us, killing us by inches. The shoulder-straps were cutting our soft back and breast muscles, and the ammunition in pouches and bandoliers felt like three cast-iron compresses on three ulcerated parts. "Bloody murder," gasped Big Kiley, as we lowered ourselves to the ground during halts, halts when the officers would gather around our C.O., consult maps, shake and nod their heads. The C.O. was Colonel Morland, who had been adjutant of the 1st battalion when he read out my court-martial sentence in Africa. A fine chap he was.

There were trains, troops crowding them. The point reached, we get off and form up to zig-zag towards where the sound of firing was coming from, and from where a staff officer would ride. "What's happening?" I heard our C.O. ask more than once. "It appears . . ." Always—"It appears . . ."

"If you move forward in—er, that direction, you'll probably find . . ."

Those were the early days when staff-officers rode horses, and pointed with riding-crops this way and that. Snatches of talk we dead-beat reservists heard during halts before moving forward to where we would "probably", etc. Cross-country racing with a donkey's load to handicap us began as soon as we turned about. Out of huge expanses of root-crops on to the hard road as the sound of firing is heard closer to where we are. In the sunlight we see away to right and left other bodies of troops scurrying about. Every now and then we are ordered to line roadside ditches, from where we cover root-crops out of which the unseen enemy is expected to appear but doesn't. Up and away, the load now feeling like an elephant's load. Again line the ditch. Get up—line the ditch. Up—down, until some of us chaps get fed-up. We can hardly breathe, and our feet are blistered, bleeding. There is loud murmuring until an officer sticks his revolver into Ginger's ribs and says that if he hears another insubordinate murmur he'll . . . So we jump to it.

The cooker-carts couldn't follow us across country, so that night it's dry chuck for us. No tea, no hot gypso—no hot anything. We don't mind if only they'll let us rest a night, but they won't. As soon as the cooker-carts catch up with us the order to move is given. Some of us reservists have taken our



boots off, and when the order to move comes we can't get the blasted things back on. "Come on, do you hear." We tie the laces, make a sort of scarf of the pair of boots and move off in our socks. At the next halt we force sore feet into the boots.

No more dodging in and out of roadside ditches ; the retreat by now is more or less orderly. Cavalry and artillery catch us up and pass us, and we pass the aged and ailing of the fleeing civilian population. We have a drink of tea every other day, and when halted for a few minutes near a deserted village we take fruit from orchards near the road. When we are told that we have an hour or so before moving off, we drum up. The recipe as follows. Into an empty, large-size bully-beef tin place one pound of newly-opened beef. Add one crushed army biscuit, also two large potatoes freshly-drawn from field after wiping soil off with handful of leaves. To those ingredients add water to within half-inch of lip of container ; then stew quickly and serve hot.

Oh, a fine country—"yes, but where the bloody hell are we running to night and day?" We'd rather fight, we say one to the other, than march twenty hours out of twenty-four with such a load. Then there is a bit of a fight, a bit of a rearguard action that I didn't see. H company, I believe, was in it the day our regiment was doing rearguard for the brigade, division or corps. We heard the shots, and we heard later that two mounted Germans had been killed, and one horse and one helmet were seen. Souvenirs, see. How was it that we reservists didn't know anything more than that our feet were hellish sore and our backs breaking under our loads? There you are. I was given to understand that our sister regiment, the South Wales Borderers, was in our brigade, the 3rd brigade of the 1st division. Yet I didn't set eyes on one of the South Wales Borderers until a couple of months later in Belgium.

Oh, talk about feeling whacked to the wide. Took some sticking, did that Retreat from Mons. But for our officers many of us reservists would have fallen into the hands of the enemy who was so close on our heels. For we were properly whacked, some of us, and had got we didn't care into whose hands we fell. So our officers took our rifles and packs and told us to hang on to the cooker-carts, to the tool-carts—to anything. They, the officers, carried our packs and rifles. One officer, a sandy-haired giant we called "Big Rees", carried three rifles and a couple of packs most of the last

half of the way. So we were glad when we were told that we had finished retreating.

We had reached a spot, a lovely spot, where a bridge carried a canal over a river that must have been the Aisne. We washed our sore feet in it, though they were not so sore as they had been, for they were getting hardened to it, as our bodies were. Rested under trees, and there was stew for dinner and tea at tea-time that day. Captain Berkeley called me and another chap named Fuller, who was a chap from Swansea, to him, to tell us that he had been keeping an eye on us, and that he was making lance-corporals of us. We had no stripes to sew on then, so we made stripes on each arm with chalk. So it was as 7647, Lance-Corporal J. Jones I went into action next day.

One of the batteries of artillery that had passed us the day before was now in position to cover our advance. On the breast of a little hill it was. From there it was blown sky-high by the enemy's guns before we started advancing uphill. In sections and platoons we galloped up the hill in short, sharp rushes. Captain Haggard, with his whistle in his mouth and his arm moving to wave us forward, coughed as he was hit in the stomach, I thought. As he fell, Fuller, who had the day previous been promoted with me, picked Captain Haggard up as he was saying "Stick it, the Welsh!" though I didn't hear him say it, for I went on up the hill with the others. Fuller carried Captain Haggard back to where he could be attended to, and so earned the V.C. We others went on up the hill, we who were lucky enough not to get hit on the way up. Right at the top there was a trench with some Germans in it, and there was one on his knees with his hands clasped, looking up at me as I stood above him in the "at the throat, thrust," position. He was mumbling in English something about wife and children in Brandenburg, so I told him to jump up out of it. Other prisoners were moving down past where I stood, moving in frightened Indian file, and this man went with them after he had pressed one of my hands with both of his.

We started consolidating the position we had captured, which, Captain Berkeley said, had to be held at all costs. But we didn't hold it long before heavy shell-fire forced us to retire to a sunken road. It was when we got there we heard that Captain Haggard had died of his wound.

Our position in the sunken road was "cushy" once we had dug ourselves in the high bank, under a line of walnut

trees—a home from home, as the chaps said. German snipers accounted for about a dozen of our chaps whilst we were there, and a few shells which we suspected were from our own guns accounted for another dozen or so. Long days of lovely weather, with the cooker-carts where the orderly men could get to them. The nights, some of them, were not so “cushy” for me, because Captain Berkeley had taken a fancy to me, and it was me that had to follow through the barbed wire barricade at the top end of the sunken road out into no man’s land. He called these night jaunts “ascertainments of the enemy’s position”, something like that. What was certain was that the snipers sniped, and I felt convinced that Captain Berkeley’s liking for my company would be the death of me. Night after night, crawling about not knowing where we were or what was coming.

There were days when he went down to brigade headquarters, wherever it was, for a conference or something. He returned from one of the conferences with the news that we were handing over the position to the French at dawn. The French came, and we went off with a rush to where we found we were badly needed. Not to another more or less sunken road, but to the blasted ridge of a hill where the Guards had been practically wiped out. No wonder.

At the end of a forced march we halted at the foot of a hill just as the sun was going down out of sight. We were curious, and we kept our eyes on the C.O., standing with company officers in attendance, evidently waiting for someone. Presently a long and lanky officer, whose age could not easily be guessed owing to the beard he had grown, came down the hillside, stepping like a famished tom-cat that was glorying in the possession of the last of its nine lives. He showed a lovely set of teeth as he smiled, talked, and pointed to the accompaniment of heavy rifle and gun-fire. One hand he kept in the high-up pocket of his riding-breeches. His rank I could not tell owing to the mucky and bloody state of his tunic. As he talked and pointed, our C.O. nodded his head.

When he went back to where he had come from the company officers returned to their companies, and soon we were following them up the slope through what was left of the trees. Tops of trees and dead men and dead horses—quite a mix-up. We reached a trench in which there were as many dead as living. The living jumped out and left the trench and the dead in it to us. “Well, I’m damned!”



But we had no time to argue, for soon some of our own chaps were wounded and killed. "Rather hot, Jones," said Captain Berkeley in that rather sleepy and unconcerned way which I was now getting used to. "It appears as though they've managed to get round our left a little." He stood up to take a look, I flattened myself against the side of the trench. Rapid fire—at nothing. Not a German could I see. But they were there all right, for as the chap next me in the trench turned half-right towards me he was shot in the back. The back, mind you. "Appears" that they've managed to get round our left a little? Why, it seemed as though we were surrounded.

They played merry hell with us before we again made way for the French. "Enfilade", so the dictionary says, means "sweeping line of men from end to end". Well, that was the kind of thing that stampeded us out of the trenches on that ridge one night. Yes, by common consent of the half that was still able to, we did what is called "a bunk". True, our officers managed to pull us up before we had gone far from the point of murder, and drove us back. "Morale," that's the word, broken, or badly bent. The French arrived to take over just in time to prevent us from again disgracing ourselves. It was rumoured that the sergeant who started the cry of "they're surrounding us" was afterwards court-martialled and shot for cowardice, but it wasn't true, for I saw the man who was supposed to have been shot for cowardice with my own two eyes when we went up to Belgium.

It was at this place from which we did "a bunk", that I took part in the strangest and largest burial-party I have been in. Hole about the size of foundation of biggish building dug. Bodies, men's and horses', strewn about the hillside, roped into bundles and dragged the way timber is dragged down hillside, to where officer waits with torch on prayer-book repeating burial service. "In with 'em." Horses who are included amongst "'em" are given the benefit of the doubt and assured of immortality. In a state of decay they were, and the smell was awful. The horses had no identity discs—or did they?—but the men's had been collected. "In with 'em. Phew, let's get the damned job done with. Any more up there? Only another couple of bundles. Then let's have 'em so as we can start covering up. That's the lot." The officer closes the prayer-book, and the men frantically go on covering up, frantically, for they are under fire and so in no mood for respecting our honoured dead. Time

enough for that if and when we get "out o' this bloody business".

Yes, we certainly were glad to get away from that death-trap of a position, for we had the wind-up properly, no doubt about that. If and when you've got the enemy on three sides out of four is not enough to put the wind-up chaps, then what is? Anyway, we were out of it, and there was plenty of room to have a stretch in the wagons in which we travelled up to some place in Belgium, for each of us now had the place of two, our own and somebody's who was killed or wounded. I think we sent field service postcards home as soon as we got off the train to tell the folks at home that we were quite well, etc.

In the Square of some town in Belgium there was a strong draft of clean soldiers from home waiting to strengthen us. The little officer, Nichol by name, came to our company, for we had lost all our officers but Berkeley. He gave us some expensive cigarettes.

Now that we were practically up to strength again, we were ready for work, and the work was waiting us round about Ypres. We marched through, and fought in and around ever so many places, but the only few names I remember were Langemarck, Gheluvelt, though I'm not so certain of them as I am of what I believe is spelt Hazebrouk. Anyway, it's the place which made our regiment want another draft from home. Talk about hell upon earth. We were shot down on our way there, shot down in the street when we got there, and shot down as we retreated from the place. Yet I don't remember seeing a single German alive or dead.

We had barricades in the street there, and an observation post in a church tower that was blown to bits. One of our chaps came down with that tower short of one of his arms. Went potty. Laughing in a way that made us other chaps shiver, and trying to point with the bleeding stump of his arm. One of the chaps had to knock him out so as to carry him away to where he could get something done for him. That was the last I saw of the pair of 'em.

After we cleared out of this Hazebrouk place, where we hadn't done much good that I could see, we sat in a field just off the road waiting for orders, I expect. As we sat there a French cavalry regiment, looking like the soldiers in Walter Howard's military dramas in our theatre at home, rode by towards Hazebrouk, where I hope they got off better than we did.

Before we had much time to lick our wounds, as the saying is, we had to go, on the double, to some place where some troops were reported to be in need of relief. We trotted along the road for some distance before we spread ourselves out across ploughed ground, or ground that had been made to look like ploughed ground by movement of men, horses and transport. It seemed to be raining bullets as we raced forward towards our objective. An officer of ours, Pack, I think his name was, got a bullet near his groin, so he stopped and limped back, holding his hand over the hole from which blood issued. Some of us reached our objective, which was a shallow trench manned by what was left of a regiment of Jocks, who, as soon as it was dark, left it to us.

About three days and nights we were holding that trench before we were relieved. What a time we had. Just as we were getting out of the blasted trench, looking forward to the first drink of tea for eighty hours, young Evans copped out. He screamed as the bullet tore its way through his belly. Captain Berkeley said: "Get him back if you can, Jones." I managed to detain three other chaps who were getting off the mark. With them I dragged young Evans behind the shelled farmhouse, where one of the doors was hanging. Having plugged young Evans' wound with our field-dressings, we laid him on the door and hoisted him up on to our shoulders. Crying like a kid he was.

Bullets were whistling, and it was doubtful if ever we would reach the hard road. But we did. Young Evans crying on our shoulders. Crying for his mother. "Mam," he cried again and again—and the shoulder I was carrying with was aching like hell. Couldn't change over, for if once we lowered him down from our shoulders it was doubtful if we would be strong enough to put him up there again. Stick it, Joney, I kept on saying to myself. I had young Evans' rifle as well as my own; his pack was serving him as pillow—

"Shoni, Shoni hoy," was what he was crying now. "Shoni," that was my name in the South Welsh tongue. "Shoni hoy," and as he moaned it above my head, and life's blood dripped down off the door on to the base of my neck, I could hear myself being called by hauliers underground. "Shoni, Shoni hoy. Give us a lift with this tram that's off the rails." I was at a football match, ground is packed. Someone shouting: "Shoni, Shoni hoy. See you by the Empire after the match—play up, Wales." What "Shoni hoy" was the boy on my shoulder calling weakly?



"Stop squirming about up there, for Christ's sake," one of the two chaps carrying in front shouted. "You're throwing all the bloody weight on me. Lie still, mun."

Presently he did lie still. When we lowered him down off our shoulders in front of a roadside dressing-station he was dead. I took his identity disc. When we found the regiment a couple of hours later I reported to Captain Berkeley, who said: "Well, you did what you could—and it was a damned fine performance to bring him back dead through that. I shan't forget to mention . . ."

It was a drink of tea I wanted more than the mention in dispatches I got for that performance, so I hurried off in search of Joe Davies, who had gone to draw my rations with his own. He also had a letter and small parcel for me, which I did not open until after I had had something to eat and drink.

Parcel from Laura, a little writing-paper and a few packets of Woodbines. In the letter she said that she was being bothered by the manager of the furnishing stores from which we had purchased an armchair and a few kitchen chairs on the instalment plan.

"The swine!" I muttered.

"Who?" said Joe Davies.

"Nobody that you know, Joe."

We covered ourself with damp blankets and went to sleep.

With the dawn back into the thick of it again. Same old game. First along the road a few miles, a road that we had to leave owing to it being shelled heavier the farther forward we went. Off the road on to cultivated, now trampled land. Open order. Moving forward, for the first time running targets in sight. Now we passed dead Germans as moving forward. The last-joined young officer is quite cool. "Forward!" he was shouting; but he stopped where he was with a hole in the centre of his forehead. Clean and sweet his death was, and I collected his identity disc. "Where's the sergeant of our platoon?" One of the chaps jerked a thumb backwards towards where the sergeant was lying ugly in death. "You're in command of the platoon, Joney," said the chap, who, as soon as we started to advance again, jumped and turned about with his hand to his backside.

"What's up with you?" I shouted.

"Shot in the bloody arse," he shouted back.

"All the best."

Some of us managed to reach the shelter of a wood, where for the first time I met and spoke to chaps of the South Wales Borderers who told me that they were all that were left of their regiment, an inaccurate statement, as was proved that night. I fell back with what was left of my platoon—bothering about cooker-carts and a drink of tea—to where I found Captain Berkeley walking up and down a narrow lane along both sides of which for about a hundred yards wounded were waiting to be taken back to where they could receive attention. I reported the death in action of the young officer, and handed his identity disc to Captain Berkeley, who took it, said: "Wait here with those men of yours until . . ."

He went off in search of the C.O., I think, only to find that he was killed. Also the adjutant, second in command—As far as I remember all but three or four were either killed or wounded.

Instead of the drink of tea we were dying for we had to start digging for our lives a trench in which to get down to fight in. We lost I don't know how many men when throwing up some barbed wire entanglements about ten yards in advance of the trench the other chaps were still digging. Berkeley, I heard, had been wounded. Not an officer left in the company; but Big Rees, now evidently in command of what's left of the regiment, is moving about as cool as a cucumber. His beard shows red in the light of a match with which he lights a fag. Great chap, Big Rees.

All of us manning the trench now. A German is seen sneaking forward to cut a passage through our barbed wire entanglement—BANG. "Got him?" Who got him? What odds as long as we got him. He now hangs over the wire moaning "Kamerad".

"Keep a sharp look-out on the right." I pass the word to and fro, feeling whacked to the wide. Oh, for a drink of tea.

Dawn breaking, and hell is let loose again. German artillery smashing a way through for the infantry. The shell, the shell comes to burst and kill and wound. "Bleeding, I'm bleeding, Joe."

"Let's have a look at you, Joney."

He clambers over the two dead men to get to me, not Joe Davies, but Joe Howells, who is a Merthyr chap like myself. He lives on the tramroad, I now remember, and likes his pint, and is a rough handful. Yet he is not rough

with me now. Tender, loving. His face is covered with black hair. He binds first my head, nothing much the matter there, but it bleeds freely. Then the two fingers, one of which is almost severed. He robs one of the dead men of his field-dressing to finish bandaging me. Then he said: "There you are, best I can do for you, Joney. Take a chance. All the best." I left him in that bay of the trench, with a dead man each side of him, facing the enemy.

On my way back to Ypres along a shell-swept road. Staggering along—oh, for a drink o' tea. Soldiers doubling forward along the hard road—into it. Glosters, I think. God help 'em—may God help us all. In the roadside ditches were those who had gone to Him. Other wounded reach hard road from more or less open country on both sides of hard road. Men using rifles as crutches, men limping, crawling, staggering—some are being carried as we carried young Evans the night he was calling "Shoni hoy—"

We wounded are taking up too much of the road getting out of it, so we again have to make way for soldiers on the double going into it. "What regiment's that?" What does it matter, anyway.

Ypres—queue-up for the doctor those of you still able to stand—oh, play the bloody game, Jerry. Haven't you done enough to us already? Must you send bloody shells after us now? Queue-up—all right, put him down there.

By ambulance to what I believe they said was a clearing-station. It had been a Seminary or something before it was a clearing-station. Oh, play the game, Jerry. Following us with bloody aeroplanes. On to a train. When it stops and I try to get out I fall down, down, down among the dead men, David John Thomas. Wake up in No. 4 General Hospital, Versailles. Ever been to Versailles? No, what's it like? Ask me another. When I got a bit better before I was taken worse again, I was out in a garden in which there were marquees where the wounded German prisoners were, I think. They carried me back to my bed, where I lay crying like a big kid. The Scottish matron said I was a nuisance, crying and stopping others to sleep at night. But the doctor who played with his silky black moustache as he looked down on me didn't say anything. Just wrote something on the sheet.

Carried out of that place again. Train, boat, train. Brighton.

Ever been to Brighton, chum? No, what's it like? There



you've got me. You see, as soon as I was able to think properly, all I could think of was getting home. The hospital I was in had been a school, I think. If I'd have been content to stay there for a while no doubt I would have known now what Brighton is like ; but before I was anything like fit, before I was marked "up", I was bothering the doctor to let me go home to Laura and the children, and to see our mam. "My head's nearly all right again, and I can get my hand dressed in both Pontypool and Merthyr hospitals." Must have got on the doctor's nerves, for he let me go. When? There you've got me, chum.

Anyway, what I do know is that in less than six months time after I had left Laura and the children, I was back with them again. I had sent a telegram to say I was coming, so she was waiting on the platform when my train steamed in, and she was searching each compartment for all she had in the world now, which was me. "Jack."

Hand in hand we hurried up the hill towards home. My right hand was in her left hand, and she held my hand tight. "Jack."

"Yes, dear. How are the children?"

"Fine—I left them with Mrs. Wood. Jack?"

"Yes, dear."

"Will—will you have to go back out there again?"

"Not if I can help it, dear——"

Then the children came running to meet me and I couldn't see them properly for crying.

## CHAPTER XVI

### POSTAL INTERLUDE

**L**AURA and our mam kept most of the letters and postcards I wrote from the time I left home to go to war to the time I sailed for home again. They are not what can be called illuminating. I wrote the first a few minutes after leaving Laura with our next-door neighbour. I thought I left home on either the Saturday or the Monday, but this first letter is dated Wednesday 5th August, 1914.

“DEAR LAURA,

I am writing these few lines in Pontypool before leaving. As I passed the Drill Hall I saw the Territorials getting ready to leave for Pembroke Dock. Little boys some of them, and some men of about fifty. So you see there are worse cases than ours is a lot. All the Builth Wells Territorials, Tom Samuels, Bert Jenkins, and that lot, will have to go. Now trust in God, dear girl, and don't keep pitying yourself all the while. Think a little for those mothers whose little boys do not know what a soldiers life is. I do. So do not sin please in this respect by worrying. Pontypool is crowded with people come to see the Territorials off. Mothers and Fathers, wives, sisters and brothers. Buck up, old girl, and again, trust in Him. Best love from your everloving JACK XXXX I shall write as soon as I can after reaching Cardiff.”

I wrote hurriedly, and with pencil, which is the case with all letters and postcards written during this period. I mentioned the Builth Wells Territorials having to go in the hope that I would strengthen her. Silly, of course, but my hasty conclusion was that by reminding her that the men of her home town would also be going off to war, it would help to reconcile her to my having to go. The same evening, Wednesday, 5th August, I wrote her from Cardiff.

“DEAR LAURA,

I am here in Cardiff, and they have issued me my uniform, and a full kit of underclothing. 2 good flannel shirts 2

thick pants 3 pairs woollen socks thick woollen Jersey and muffler. 2 suits, greatcoat, and everything I want for my use. I am sending my own clothes home, you will get them in a day or two. They will pay you two shillings a day whilst I am here, it will be sent to you by the paymaster once a week. I don't know exactly what day you will get it. We may leave Cardiff in a day or two. I shall write to let you know when we do. I cannot give you my address to write to me yet, as I am hardly settled here. I feel fine. Keep a good heart dear. I may be back with you before long. Kiss the little ones for me. No more at present. With best love, JACK."

According to that we were served out with kit the day of arrival at the Depot, so my memory's a day out. The letter from the Depot, I think, was written with Jimmy Price and Big Kiley trying to drag me across the canteen. I seem to remember one of them shouting: "First you said you wanted to put your kit tidy, now you must write to the missus. Come on, let's go an' have a drink." Something like that. No wonder I said in my letter to Laura that I could not give her any address then to write to, for we reservists did not on that first night know where we were going to lay our heads, for the Depot was crowded out with us. It wasn't so crowded the following night, as this letter proves.

*Thursday night, Aug. 6th.*

"DARLING WIFE,

I am off to the South of England to-night. We don't know exactly where we are going. I will write as soon as possible after I get there, keep a good heart love and trust in God read your Bible often love that's where you will find strength, feel fine excuse scribble writing under difficulty mind dont cry, I will send my address as soon as possible kiss children for me best love Goodnight love XXXX."

That was written standing, whilst waiting to move off in marching order. Big Kiley and Jimmy Price also required looking after, for they and others in the same state were leaving the ranks. I seem to remember having to stop writing to lift Kiley to his feet and fasten his putties. The letter was posted on the way down to the railway station, the way that was lined with the city's cheering citizens. The letter that follows was written under conditions more favourable for writing.



No 7647 Pte J Jones  
B Coy  
Welsh Regt  
Bordon  
Hants

*Aug 7th*

"DEAR WIFE,

I arrived here this morning and I feel splendid, it is a lovely country around here as far as I have seen of it, I want you to write me a letter at once by return of post, because I am afraid we shall be moving from here before long, I may not get it as it is, if this letter lies overnight, but I should make a practise of calling at the Pontnewynydd post office each day if I were you, I hope that by this time you have regained your good spirits and cheerfulness, whatever happens and wherever I go I hope you will keep up and be strong and courageous and cheerful for the sake of our little ones who have nobody to depend on now but you, put your trust in God love, and he will carry you through, I am trying to be cheerful and to have faith in him to keep you until I return, I may not be able to write to you so often in the future as I have done those few days, but you must not worry, I shall write to you at every opportunity now mind to write at once and post your letter personally at the general post office Pontypool and then I may get it before I leave here. I have never seen such a lot of troops about as I seen lately, there were crowds in the street at Cardiff cheering us as we came away last night. I have picked up with one or two Decent tidy men for chums, let me know if Mr. Frankhum got my pay for you, have you heard from Merthyr or Builth kiss the little ones for me, I have no more news at present, so I close Dear Wife with best love from your everloving husband JACK XXXX mind and be careful to write the address correct, copy it word for word as you see it in this letter, love again sweetheart JACK X."

What happened to the letter I threw out through the window of the compartment as our train slowly entered the docks part of Southampton? Did the chap on the bike get off to pick it up? Perhaps a "movement of troops" officer or non-com' took it off him, for I seem to remember seeing him pick it up—and didn't Laura tell me she had had it?

Anyhow, for the life of me I can't find it. Perhaps it's just as well I can't for if I rightly remember it was emotional in

the extreme, particularly the last part which was scrawled within sight of the ships. But the next one isn't so bad, a postcard this time, which was stamped at the Army Base Post Office on AU 21 14.

Welsh Regt on Active Service

"DEAR LOL

Still feeling splendid in health and in good spirits, hoping you and the children are the same, having grand weather these last days kiss the little ones for me. Best love from your everloving husband JACK XXXXX."

Evidently I had said something impassable in previous postcards, for this is the first Laura received from France, though I had written several others previous to it, and, I think, one letter. These two first postcards she received are not the printed kind she received later, but squarish plain postcards, the second of which is dated officially AU 22 14.

Welsh Regt on Active Service

"DEAR LOL

Still well and strong and in good spirits, hoping you and the little ones are the same, I hope to write you a long letter soon, I have not received anything from you since your second letter, as I am on the move all the while, I expect I shall have them all together, I now close with best love from your everloving JACK kiss little ones for me XXXX."

Where was I from August 22nd to September 16th? which was the date of the letter evidently written in the comparative safety and comfort of our position in the sunken road. Here it is: Second Letter (What happened to the first?) September 16th, 1914.

"DEAREST WIFE,

I got another letter from you a few days ago I am still feeling splendid, and I am glad to hear that you and the children are well, you must not worry about me as I am allright I am very glad to hear that people are so kind to you, and I am glad to hear that the colliery company are going to help you, keep a good heart all will come right kiss children for me God Bless you all goodnight love JACK XXXX."

Then I go on to scrawl a little more, and the tone of it suggests that I was on the break, and that it was written not when we were fairly snug in the sunken road position, but in our next position, where we arrived to find the Guards wiped

out. Where we did the mass burying, and where we had wind up and stampeded. The place where we were continually under heavy fire from our front and left and left rear. Here's the rest :

"dont send any more parcels, dont listen to idle rumours, dont be alarmed if you are rather long getting a letter from me, as I dont get a chance to write very often, and do the children for me, and I want you, Dear Wife, whatever happens in the future to trust in God entirely and then all will be well, hope for the best and be strong for our little ones sake, I have no news further, give my love to all my people in Merthyr, so I conclude with fondest love from your everloving husband JACK XXXX kiss the little ones for me Goodnight & May God Bless & Protect you and them now and for evermore X JACK."

Evidently what is called one's "morale" was on the break, for the next letter, undated, was handed to a comrade under the impression that my last hour had come. I was saying good-bye to him before rushing back into action. His name was David Price, and he was waiting for bearers to carry him away. He was a Merthyr man like myself, and I made him promise that if he got home alive he would hand to our mam what I then thought was my last words to Laura. Mam, I felt, after she had heard of my passing, would go to Laura with my letter. Here it is :

"DEAR LAURA

I am giving this to a comrade in hopes that it will reach you, Now Lol if anything happens to me, don't give way to despair, but trust your future to God, to whom I commend myself, you, and the children, do your duty to them and we shall all meet again in Heaven above, to the end I love you, goodbye Lol, be strong, trust in God, your husband X JACK."

Two pages torn from a small notebook, my last farewell, I thought. Our mam handed them back to me when next I saw her. David Price kept his promise to deliver them. The next is the first of our collection of Field Service Post Cards, on which I could not let myself go. The date is September 23rd, 1914. "Quite well."

Oct 3rd, 1914 :

"I am quite well, and am going on well. I have received your letter. Letter follows at first opportunity. *Signature only.* JOHN JONES."



October 5th, 1914: Still "quite well", etc.

October 11th, 1914: Still "quite well", etc.

Two days later a longish letter, at the head of which I note for the first time the rank to which I was promoted by Captain Berkeley to go into action on the Aisne. Here it is:

No 7647

Lance Corporal J Jones

B Coy 2nd Welsh Regt

3rd Brigade 1st Division

British Expeditionary Force

France Oct 13th, 1914.

"MY DEAR WIFE

I received another letter from you yesterday morning, and I was very glad to hear that you and the children are still well, and I am pleased to be able to say that I am still in splendid health and spirits, for which I am very thankful, I am pleased to hear that you and the children are taking advantage of the fine weather to get out about, and I hope you will continue to take advantage of every fine day, as I think there is nothing better for the health than plenty of outdoor exercise, I expect you have made your blackberry Jam by now, I hope I shall be able to share some of it with you, I wrote a letter to my parents a few days ago and I asked them to write to me, give them my love when you write to them, give my kind regards to Tom & Linda and tell Tom that I would like him to write a few lines to me, I should appreciate it very much, we are having splendid weather here now, we have had no rain for some time now, you must try and keep Glynne from thinking and worrying overmuch over my absence, when you see him silent and thinking you must speak to him on some subject which will keep his thoughts from me, how are they getting on with their lessons now, we get very good food here, good warm clothing, and plenty of tobacco for a moderate smoker, so there is nothing that I am in want of, I have no more news at present, Dear Wife, so I will now conclude with best love from your everloving husband JACK, whose earnest prayer is that God will Bless and Protect you and our children now and for ever, I ask it in Our Saviours Name Amen. Kiss the little ones for me. Goodnight love XXXX."

Evidently I was bucking myself up, getting to be more of a man, for the tone of that is not so bad considering that we were about then in the hell of which Ypres was the centre, or

cockpit, or whatever they call it. By the 17th October 1914, I am back on "I am quite well", etc., postcards again, but October 25th has a letter I well remember writing. Here it is :

Address same as previous letter.

"MY DEAR LAURA

I received a letter from you and one from home the day before yesterday and I got your parcel of writing paper and letter and cigarettes to-day, you must not spend your money on cigarettes for me as we get tobacco and cigarettes served out once a week so you need not send any more, I am very glad to hear that you are at Merthyr and I want you to go over for a few days at least once a month for a few days as the change will do you and the children good, I am sorry to hear about poor Frank, I hope the operation will be successful I shall write to them when I get the chance, I hope you wont feel anxious when you do not receive a letter from me for a week or more, because we do not always get a chance to post our letters I thank you, dear wife, for your promptitude in sending the writing paper and also furnishing me with the information about my brothers, and the pay you receive, etc., I am sorry to hear that the boys have had colds, now Lol, I want you to get plenty of Scott's Emulsion for them, get that no matter what goes behind, you must explain to the furniture people how you are situated and that I am out here and I dont think that he or the rent man can press you for payment, if they do, make an appeal to Mrs. Percy Jones and I am sure she will assist you, now Lol, about myself, I am saying the gospel truth when I say that I am feeling splendid in health and spirits, and I still trust myself to God and try to prepare myself each day to submit myself to his Will whatever it is, and I want you, love, to do the same, we have plenty of warm clothing, good food, a blanket and a waterproof sheet, so you see I want for nothing, so you need not feel at all anxious about me, we are still having fine weather out here, give my best respects to Tom & Linda, and my love to all my dear ones at Merthyr, I have no more news just now, dear Wife, so I conclude with best love from your everloving husband JACK, whose earnest prayer is that God will bless & protect you and our little ones now and for ever Amen XXXX kiss the little ones for me goodnight my love XXXX."

That, in which I was more sparing than usual with my comma

for all purposes, was the letter I wrote after returning to the regiment after young Evans had died on us as we shouldered him for miles through the night on the door. It was the only letter "his censorship", as we called the young officer who censored our regiment's letters, censored for despatch that night, and he only did so after I had told him about the swine of a chap who had been pressing Laura to continue her payments on the bit of furniture we had got on the instalment plan before the war was thought of. Her allowance wasn't much, and the doctor had said that our boy Glynne had to have at least two bottles of Scott's Emulsion a week. I don't know how I came to write that I had had a letter from her "the day before yesterday", for we were where no letters could be delivered that day, or that week. Writing in a hurry at night no doubt accounts for my mistake.

"Oct 28th 1914" yields an "I am quite well", etc., postcard, so does "Nov 2nd 1914", the last of the "I am *quite* well", etc., series of postcards. Two days later, November 4th, 1914, I wrote this in Ypres whilst waiting with I don't know how many more wounded for the ambulance-wagons which were to take us to the clearing-station which had before the war been a Seminary. As we waited, Ypres was being heavily shelled, and it was doubtful as to whether any of us would after all require the ambulance-wagons we were waiting to board, or be lifted into. I didn't much care, for after the busy butcher-like—in appearance only—doctor had with his knife lopped off the dropped half of one of my fingers, he loudly called for an ounce of brandy for me. It was handed me by a Padre, and I sipped it whilst the orderly dressed me, the doctor meanwhile stood considering the shattered elbow of the man who had in the line of standing-up cases stood behind me in the queue working forward to the doctor. And the brandy made me drunk and devil-may-care, but not drunk enough to forget Laura. Had I put a bucket of brandy into my empty, exhausted and nerve-wracked self, I think I would still have remembered Laura. But this is what I wrote, and what the censor passed in the name of, and with the seal of the Crown. "Nov 4th 1914."

"DEAR WIFE

Just a line to let you know that I have hurt my left hand slightly, nothing to be alarmed about though, but I shall have to go to hospital for a day or two, so I will let you know where to address letters to in my next postcard, feel splendid



otherwise best love from your everloving JACK, kiss little ones for me, may God keep you all Xxxx."

I remember looking at the big kiss for Laura whilst waiting for the ambulance-wagons. Some said that the shelling was holding them up somewhere. By now there were hundreds of wounded standing and lying about. There were two madmen who were not wounded on their bodies. They moved about saying and doing all sorts of daft things. The biggest of them, bigger than any policeman he was, when the shells went singing over, would play his fingers and make noises similar to those men make when trying to encourage a reluctant caged singing-bird to sing. Treated the singing shells as though they were canaries or something. The other one, the short one, he was a private too, moved about like an officer, saying : "Keep a sharp lookout on the right, you men—our left is well covered. Where is my adjutant?" and a lot more silly talk. Some of the slightly wounded thought these two chaps lead-swingers, but I don't think that, for when we others pressed ourselves against the wall, or ran in under the archway when the shells came singing along, the two men acting the goat went on performing right in the middle of the road.

It was getting on for night when the ambulance-wagons at last came, and by this time there were more wounded than there was room. So we were packed tight for the rough-ride over shell-holed roads to the clearing-station, which seemed to be full of wounded when we got there. There were three stone floors in the place. The nearly dead were left on the ground-floor, a couple of hundred of 'em ; the not-too-bad legs and torso cases were helped up on to the second floor ; we head and hand and arm cases able to keep on our feet had to go right up to the third floor ; from there we had to go right down and out to the yard to go to the lavatories. It was then the stretched-out chorus on the ground-floor put the wind up one, for the cries of a couple of hundred in agony—for little could be done to ease them there—was enough. . . .

I was crossing the yard from the lav. when the German plane came over and began dropping bombs. Everybody ran who could run, except the two dafties. They stood in the centre of the yard, looking and pointing up at the plane, which, thank goodness, missed the clearing-station with its bombs. We were a day and a night there waiting for the hospital train. "Nov 6th 1914" I was writing Laura from a hospital which I was told had once been the Trianon Palace Hotel. Here it is :

7647 Lce Cpl J Jones  
2nd Welsh Regt  
No 4 General Hospital  
Versailles, France.

"MY DEAR WIFE

Just a line in hopes of finding you in the best of health as I am pleased to say it leaves me at present, with the exception of my finger and that is getting better, this is a fine hospital that we are staying at here we get good treatment and we are well looked after in all ways, plenty of good food and we get plenty of writing paper tobacco cigarettes etc given us, so you need not worry about sending anything, mind that now, and plenty of books to read and everything that a man can possibly want in hospital, I hope that you and the children have had another trip to Merthyr by now, if you have not, run over there and stay there for a week or so and enjoy yourself and you can make arrangements to have my letters sent on to you, please try and go now, it would please me very much if you did, give my best respect to Tom and Linda, and the children, tell them I think of them often ask Tom to drop me a line, perhaps he has wrote, but I dont suppose it will reach me now, as I am from the regt, well Laura Dear Everything is going well with me and I hope with you also, there is only one thing more I pray to God for, and that is to see you and the little ones if only for a day, one day, this three months has seemed very long away from you, never mind perhaps that will come, trust to God we must, I have no more at present, Give my love to my dear ones at Merthyr and send them my letters, I will now close with best love from your everloving husband JACK XXXX kiss little ones for me."

Things for me in that hospital were not as good as I tried to make out in my letter to Laura, for my two fingers, the one cut in half and the one they were trying to save, went septic, and I had to have an operation. There were times when I also went off my head and behaved like a baby, and the nurse used to fetch the matron to me in the night when I was most afraid of myself and everything. The matron was a Scottish lady who said that I was not the only one they had to look after in that hospital. I knew that. I also got to know that the matron had herself to look after, so did the nurses. Paris, which I had never seen, being so close, could not be altogether neglected by the matron and the nurses, who were,

I know, entitled to their nights off, and they didn't want to be troubled too much by the likes o' me. I knew that, couldn't help knowing it, for I was always awake and afraid of I knew not what, and I could hear the giggling and talking of those who had not seen Pricey die, who had not had to dig that big hole to put all those men in that night. "Perhaps you'd like one of us sit beside you and hold your hand all night?" the matron said. Paris was so near, and the war so new—to them.

There were wounded German prisoners in that hospital too, they were in marquees out in the extensive grounds, and after I was well enough to get about I saw some of them. I wrote two letters to my parents from this hospital, on the 9th of November I wrote the first. Here it is :

"MY DEAR PARENTS

As you will observe by the above address that I am in Hospital having been wounded slightly in the head and hands on October 31st by Shrapnel from the German big guns, the cuts on my head were nothing to speak of and are allright now and so is my right hand, all that is the matter now is that I have lost the top of the forefinger of my left hand, so I will soon be quite well again, and I must be very thankful to God for his mercy in preserving me safe so long as he has, as I have been in the thick of the fighting since the beginning of the war and have seen my comrades fall on all sides of me and I have only had this slight wound, the same shell as did this to me killed the poor fellow next to me, do not show this letter to Laura because I have made very light of my hurt when I wrote to her, and now my dear Parents if ever anything happens to me from now on I want you to do your best for my wife and little ones. I dont know why I ask you this as I am sure you would do all you could if anything ever did happen, I am in splendid health and I hope you are all the same we are being treated splendid at this hospital, we get plenty of everything, I got your letter and handkerchiefs, let me know how poor Frank is getting on, give my love to Mr & Mrs Bevan and all my brothers and sisters and Bopa and Uncle Edwin and all my friends and relations, I have no more news just now Dear Parents so I close with best love from your everloving son John Goodnight and God Bless you all Dont show this letter to Laura and mind to write a long letter back to me soon XXX JACK."

I had a long letter back, "written", dad wrote, "by my own hand. The first letter for me to ever write with my own



hand, for you know I dont have much schooling . . .” Where did I put that wonderful letter? And how could I say in my letter to my parents that I was wounded on October 31st, when I was sending “ I am quite well ” postcards up to “ Nov 2nd 1914 ”? Off my head, I expect. This last letter is rather mixed, so perhaps it is good that there are no more, for this interlude is longer already than I thought it would be. Here it is. Same address :

“ My Dear Parents Nov 13th

I received your kind and welcome letter this morning and those two lovely handkerchiefs for which I thank you and Bopa for very much and I shall treasure them always, and such a splendid long letter, I could not write a better one myself, I would like to have a letter like that from you every week, and I was so glad to hear that Dear Frank was getting better, and that you my Dear Loving Parents were both in good health, may God grant that you remain so, and I hope you will not be offended at me writing to Job and Blodwen as I did, and please dont be offend with my Laura for telling me that there was a slight disagreement between you, please give my love to Job and Blodwen and ask them please not to be offended at me writing to them like I did, as I did it out of love for them, and ask them please to write to me, I had a letter from Laura this morning and she also sent your letter which you sent her so as I could see how you was all getting on, she tells me she and the children are all-right except for slight colds, I am glad William is getting allright, I hope, dear Parents, I hope that you receive government allowance for his children, you are entitled to at least 8/- a week and if you do not receive that you should make inquiries and write to the War Office, mind that now, that is the very least they can allow you, and then I think they must allow you something for looking after, so see into the matter and let me know how you get on when you write next, and David could allow you something out of his pay also as he gets about 14/- a week so write to him about it, our Bell says in her letter that she is going to send cigarettes out to me, well now we get plenty of cigarettes given to us in this hospital and if she wants to send me anything I would like her to send me a bit of chocolate and some sweets packed in a tin box, as I like a sweet to take after the medicine they give me here, tell Daniel I will be able to tell him something to put in his paper when I come home I am writing

a postcard to Bopa today, give her and Uncle my love I must tell you Dear Parents, but dont tell Laura, that I went under operation a few days ago and had a piece more of my finger off and had it cleaned up and stitched, and it has been pretty painful but is getting better now, I have no more news at present, I am in good health and spirits, write me a long letter soon, I now close dear loving parents with Best love to all from your everloving son John Goodnight and God Bless you all."

This last letter is only useful—hardly interesting—as a reminder of my state of mind about the time it was written. There are unfinished words, and there are gaps, and the punctuation is more slovenly than ever. I write and advise with the authority of one speaking from beyond the grave. I am peace-maker between my mother and my sister Blodwen ; I am comforter in chief, to Frank and William, both of whom have lost their wives. Frank has gone back to mam to die ; and she has taken William's three motherless children to look after whilst he goes to fight the foe. David has also joined up, and I suggest he should make an allotment to mam. I ask her to give my love to an aunt and uncle with one breath, and with the other say I am dropping them a postcard with my love. I ask God to bless them, quite sincerely, no doubt, but this continual appealing to God on their behalf and Laura's seems to imply that they are rather in need of his forgiveness also. Then the operation . . . Time I was sent home, for I was never in my right mind.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ON THE HOME FRONT

NEXT morning after we had had breakfast Laura said : "When are you going across to Merthyr to see your mother?"—"As soon as ever you can get the children ready."—"I must clean up a bit first," she said.—"You and your cleaning—— All right. Whilst you're cleaning up, I'll go over to the hospital to get my hand dressed. Get the children to go as far with me."—"But they won't allow children——"—"You get 'em ready."

Dr. Mulligan dressed my hand ; advised me to keep my eldest boy, Glynne, on Scott's Emulsion ; and asked me questions about how things were going out in France and Belgium. "Oh, we're not doing so bad," I told him. "I'm going across to Merthyr to spend a few days with my people, so I won't be seeing you again for a week or so."—"Any time," he said. "You needn't bother to come all the way up here to the hospital. See me at the surgery. Whilst you're at Merthyr attend the hospital there for dressing each morning, for that one finger of yours wants watching. The other's not so bad." Nice chap, Dr. Mulligan.

Laura had dinner ready when we reached home, and she had done all her cleaning, so it wasn't long before we were down at the Halt waiting for the top-line train. Just missed the one, so we had a long wait, and another long wait for a connection at Brynmawr, so it was getting on towards evening when we got to mam's. Dad and the boy Ike had had their taters an' meat and bathed.

"John fach," mam said.

"Here I am, mam."

"Yes, thank God. Sit down, I'll put you food now. The children are looking well, Laura—what do you think of my three children, my second lot?" Billa's three little motherless boys smiled at my three children. "Their father's took your place in France, John. Dave an' Dick'll soon be there too, I expect," she said, as she went on laying the



table, saying as Laura rose to help : " Sit you down, my gel."

Dad, in his armchair, was crying as he held my hand, but mam didn't cry. " You know about Frank," she said. " He's in bed in the front-room where I can best tend on him. Won't have him long, for it's "—she lowered her voice—" it's cancer. But he doesn't know it. A blow he had in his work down the pit, the doctor thinks. Never showed until after he lost Rosie and his baby. So there he is—— But not a word to him, remember. He thinks he's getting better."

" I understand, mam. Laura and me and the children thought to stay a few days with you, but with Frank downstairs in bed in the front-room ; and Billa's three children as well, there'll——"

" It'll be all right for you an' Laura an' the children to stay at least a week, I'll find room for you all to sleep. There's a spare bed at your Bopa Marged's, and another at your sister Blodwen's. Plenty of place to sleep ; but you'll have all your food here with me. Now, leave Laura an' the children in here with me whilst you go in to Frank for a minute, he's been talking a lot about you. Mind, he's getting better."

" I understand, mam." Into the next room I went to smile down on our Frank, aged twenty-eight and a widower ; back home with mam to die. How handsome he was, " The handsomest of you all," mam was always saying.

" Hullo, Frank."

" Johnny—sit there where I can see you. Our Johnny. How's your hand ? "

" Getting better ; and mam tells me you're getting better."

" Yes, much better than I've been. Once I'm able to get up and go out—— But never mind me now. Our old Johnny. Our Dave was saying in his letter—he sent me his photo. Got one more stripe than you, our Johnny. Did you know that our Dick's been sent to Ireland ? He sent me his photo too. Our Billa said he was going to send me his photo, but he went to France without sending it. Our Ike, they wouldn't have him. Sent him home. If only I was better, it's the navy I'd go for. The sea, our Johnny . . . "

Like a child he talked, not like one who had been married and widowed.

" Come on an' have food now, John," said mam from the doorway. Frank bent his head back to see her ; she smiled at him. Such a smile. The kind of smile men-children rest on without fear on the last lap of life's journey. It was a smile that

took him in, enfolded him ; but who can explain it ? His head bent back to look at her as he had when a baby at her breast. " You'll have plenty chance to talk to John for Laura an' him an' the children are staying for a week. Do you want anything now, my boy ? "

" After you've tended on them," he said.

Whilst we were enjoying a late tea, Ike made us laugh by imitating the N.C.O.'s he had been handled by at Shrewsbury before he was sent home as unfit—or was it " not likely to prove an efficient soldier " ? Anyway, he was an efficient collier, so they sent him home, and now he was making us laugh. Twice whilst we were at tea mam rose from the table and said : " Frank's calling." None of us heard him call, but she did, and went to him.

" Come to the recruiting meeting in the Drill Hall, John ? " dad said.

" Go to the threatre with Laura, John," mam said. " Leave the children here with me, they can play with these of Billa's."

" I'd rather stay here with you, mother," said Laura.

" Then you come along with me, John," said dad, " for we hear fine speakers at the recruiting meetings. We've had Ben Tillet an'——"

" Fine or no," said mam, " they'll talk no more out of me, for I've no more for 'em. Come with me into Frank's room a minute, John."

" Can I come as well to see Frank ? " said Laura.

" After they've gone out, my gel." I followed mam into the front-room. " Here's that bit of a letter you gave Davie Price to give to me for Laura. Thank God it's not wanted. Only me an' Frank knows about it, he read it for me. Better burn it, John."

" No, I shan't burn it, mam."

" Do you think you'll have to go back out there, my boy ? "

" No, he won't," said Frank from his bed.

" Frank knows," mam said. " My Frank is wise. He could tell me very near to the day when our Billa was going to France."

" Come on, John," cried dad, appearing in the doorway with his bowler hat on ready to go. " Frank, I'm taking John to the recruiting meeting."

" You'll be taking him somewhere else before the meeting," said Frank, smiling.

Dad laughed. " Frank knows," said mam. " Come on, John," said dad. Off out we went. Down the hill, passing the

first houses of Tai-Harry-Blawd before turning right over the bridge and out on to the main street, where everything was lively. Everybody laughing and talking as though there was nothing going on to worry them.

"We'll have one apiece here before going to the Drill Hall." Dad led the way into the Owen Glyndwr. "Two pints o' best."

"No, a lemon-dash for me, dad."

"No," he said, "for that damned stuff'll blow you out like a frog."

"All right, a half-pint."

The bar was crowded, but I was the only soldier there. "Is this your son, Davie Jones?" said a man.

"Yes, this is my oldest boy; just back wounded from France."

"Shake hands, boy. What are you having?"

"They're bringing our drinks," said dad.

"Then keep your money in your pocket, Davie. I'm paying. You an' your boy can have the best—have a tot of whisky in your beer. Two tots of whisky as well."

"No, thank you. You see, I'm not feeling any too grand——"

"An' he never was much for the drink," dad explained.

"Then he must have a cigar," said the man.

"I don't smoke cigars."

"Do you smoke a pipe then?"

"No, cigarettes."

"Hoy, a big packet, a shilling packet of fags for this soldier. Never let it be said——"

"We're off to the recruiting meeting," said dad.

"So am I," said the man.

It must have been he that told the recruiting officer that I was present in the audience, for when we went towards the entrance he left dad and I to go along to the door leading on to the platform. The hall was crowded, all the seats were occupied, and there were people standing jammed behind the last row of seats. Standing on the tip of my toes I had glimpses of the platform over the heads of those standing in front of me. It was what is called, I believe, "a representative platform". Brewers, professional men, ministers of religion, a Salvation Army officer, and a few patriotic ladies. One of the ministers was appealing for recruits when I entered.

I was beginning to feel sorry I had come when someone touched me on the shoulder. I turned my head to find an unbelievably smart officer, sweet-smelling and shiny. I stood



to attention and saluted with my good right hand. "Quite all right," he said. "Someone told me you were present. What is the name?"—"Jones, sir. 7647 Lance-Corporal J. Jones, Welsh Regiment."—"This way," he said.—"Where are you taking him to?" said dad.—"My father, sir," I explained.—"Proud to meet you," the officer said, shaking dad's hand. "I want your son to say a few words from the platform."—"Oh, by all means," said dad. "Go on, John."—"I'm no speaker."—"Just a word or two," said the officer, "for you're one of the first to arrive back wounded——"—"Go on, John," dad said. I followed the officer out and around to the door leading to the platform. "You tell 'em, John," dad said. "I'll wait here for you." Now I wished I had allowed that man to put that tot of whisky into my half-pint of beer.

The recruiting officer left me out of sight on the side of the platform whilst he conferred in whispers with the chairman, who looked my way, and said: "Certainly, immediately." He leaned over the table to stop the speaker then appealing for recruits, who at once made way for me. The recruiting officer led me on to introduce me to the chairman, who introduced me to the audience as "one of our own"; as "one of a family of which every eligible member has responded to the call"; as "one who has fought and bled"; as "one whose presence here to-night"—and a lot more he said before he said he was proud to have the honour of calling upon me to say a few words to "this great and representative Merthyr audience".

When I stood up the applause was terrific. No doubt, with my bandaged head and hand, I looked more or less heroic standing there. Someone started singing something, and those seated stood up to join in. What could I say to them? When the applause died down, and the people who had stood up had sat down again, the chairman showed his teeth in a smile meant to be encouraging. Still dumb, wetting my lips and swallowing hard. Never before had I stood in front of people who expected me to speak to them. "We're in it," I started, "and I suppose we've got to get out of it as best we can. I heard one of these gentlemen appealing for recruits. Well, they're wanted. Our regiment wanted help badly when I left it. We were only a handful left when—when I got this bit; and God only knows what's happened to that handful by now. Anyway, the chaps out there want all the help they can get, and they're entitled to all the help they can get. And there it is. I'm no speaker, but—well, there it is." I turned and walked

off the platform with my head down, feeling I had made a fool of myself. Evidently the audience didn't think so, for the applause was even more terrific than when I stood up to speak.

"Magnificent appeal," the recruiting officer said as he followed me to where dad was waiting. He shook my hand, took my name and number, and said he would probably be seeing me again as soon as my leave was up. "You'll excuse me now," he said, and went inside.

"Let's go an' have a drink," dad said.

I would have preferred to go home, but somehow I couldn't leave dad that first night, even though I knew that he was, in his foolish pride, making an old show of me. But there was that letter, the first he had ever written with his own hand, the letter which had cheered me when I received it in hospital at Versailles. So I went with him into the Owen Glyndwr, where I could, free of charge, have got as drunk as a lord on the best the house had on tap. To please dad I drank two half-pints whilst he drank four pints, after which we went home.

After a couple of months' leave I returned to my Depot at Cardiff, from where I was immediately returned to Merthyr as "Recruiter". The Merthyr recruiting officer had applied for my services. So it was in my home town as "Recruiter" that I served for the next fourteen months; for a couple of months after the end of the voluntary period. What a game it was. I returned to the Depot with glowing testimonials from the two officers under whom I served.

For over a year up to the middle of 1916 I dodged the column, played for safety, wearing ribbons around my hat. My three brothers, Billa, Dave and Dick, were settling down in France; and Laura was expecting another baby over in Pontypool. That would make four I was responsible for bringing into what then appeared to be a mad world. Having done a bit, "my bit", I felt that Laura and the children had first claim on me for as long as I was spared. Living free of charge with mam so that my pay could go untouched to Laura at Pontypool, I became the home correspondent to three brothers in France. Reading between the lines of their letters I was able to guess what things were like "over there". So I played for safety for all I was worth.

Soon I became a fluent speaker. I marched batches of recruits from the recruiting station to the homes and offices of Justices of the Peace to be sworn in. The handiest J.P. was Mr. J. M. Berry, the father of the highly successful Berry brothers.

He was patient and considerate with some of the men who had had too much to drink before joining up, spoke to them like a father as they stood swaying about in front of him. The war appeared to be worrying him, for he sighed heavily after "swearing-in" the batches of recruits. I marched up the stairs to his office from the recruiting-station across the street. Yes, Mr. Berry was by far the nicest of the J.P.'s to deal with.

Our family suffered casualties on the home front during this period. Brother Frank, accompanied to the border by mam, passed on. She was prepared for that, but she wasn't prepared for the death of little Georgie, the second of Billa's three boys, who was knocked down and killed by a motor-car when out playing one day. They took his body to mam, who took him in her arms and said: "Georgie fach."

Later that same evening I sat with her, in my hand a pen with which I was going to write to Billa. "Put it best way you can, John," mam said. "God help Billa. Enough for him to be where he is without having to hear this. Tell him—— But there, you know." It wasn't often she cried, but she did then. "We'll remember this old war, John." I sat trying to think of words with which to ease the blow I was to pass on to my brother.

Our town also suffered a great loss, though at that time few realized what a great loss it was to lose Keir Hardie. Sorrowing, he died; and almost before the breath had left his body a "win-the-war" candidate was being sought for to take his place—*fill* his place nobody could. There was a war-time by-election which only a Hardie could fight and win. He fought and won his footing in Merthyr during the Boer War, and for fifteen years my home town was honoured again as it had been up to '88 by the representation of Henry Richard. Yet, despite the peace work of Henry Richard, and the work of Keir Hardie, the man who came forward in Hardie's name at this time was rejected in favour of a "win-the-war" candidate. The man who said he would follow in Hardie's footsteps was howled down. I watched and listened, gagged by the uniform I wore, and the recruiter's colours around my hat, and grew in understanding of that blood-thirsty and irresponsible phenomenon so difficult to label and deal with, the war-crowd.

However, there was my own life to preserve for Laura and the children. My days were filled arranging "stunts" and marching batches of recruits to be sworn in, and marching them



down to the railway station where I gave them railway warrants and wished them "all the best". There were many "stunts" which required my assistance, only one of which need be referred to. We decorated a double-decker tram with flags and posters. On the top-deck we placed the Town Band to play martial airs as the tram was driven along the streets. "What did you do in the great war, daddy?" etc., etc.

Meetings arranged most evenings. With another wounded hero (?) I had a roving commission with which to work cinemas, music-halls and theatres. My colleague was no speaker, but he could recite Gunga Dhin. "You're a better man than I am . . ." etc., etc. Left me to do all the talking. Between the acts of a play at theatres; in between turns at music-halls; and between pictures at the cinemas, we two practitioners of the art of *self-defence* did our stuff. We were a fairly good double act that patriotic managers were only too pleased to hold the show up for.

We worked alone, without the support of "representative platforms" such as were arranged as "backing" for speakers of the first flight. I took a night off to help control the crowd which almost wrecked the Rink when Bottomley during his "Rouse Britain" tour came to our town. Everybody said it was a great meeting.

Sometimes I worked with the resident, second-string suffragette team of speakers, which included Mrs. Pankhurst and Mrs. Flora Drummond. Shared platforms with them occasionally. Mrs. Pankhurst used to sigh as she slowly rose when called upon by the chairmen to address gatherings. She was too sad and reasonable to be successful as a recruiting speaker. But when chairmen called upon Flora Drummond to address gatherings, she used to jump to it like a war-horse, and speak rousingly. She was a good recruiting speaker.

As time went on the best appeals fell on deaf ears, for those who had not gone, having realized by now what was waiting for them "over there", decided that response to our appeals was nothing less than suicidal. Only the aged and obviously unfit men, and women who thought that "the others" should go now that *theirs* had gone, came to our meetings. There weren't very many in the district available, for it was now being recognized as a "work of national importance" district, coal and steel being so necessary. Still, there was a minority that resisted all the appeals of the voluntary period. So they had to be "fetched", or as good as "fetched".

An end to talking, then. Comb them out, bring them before

the tribunals. The men of one-man businesses ; the sole support of the widowed mother must state their cases. Town no longer jolly ; tense, tight-lipped men appear before tribunals composed of senile head-shakers who look up from papers at those brought before them. Out on the streets are suspicious watchful men and women whose sons have already "made the supreme sacrifice", and they want to know why it is that so-and-so's boy is allowed to remain at home in safety and doing his eye-good after "my poor boy has died for his country".

So those on the tribunal have to be stern, for some of them have also sent sons "over there". Ministers of religion appear before tribunals to "put the case" for members of churches and chapels whose responsibilities at home are such as to warrant them remaining at home. Members of tribunals are visited late at night in their homes by people high up who have men they want to keep near them at home. "You leave it to me."

There are conscientious objectors, I.L.P. teachers and others who had sat at the feet of Keir Hardie. They are "fetched" and taken to Wormwood Scrubs. "They ought to be shot," cry those whose boys are over there. Twice I take a trip to London as guard to stubborn couples of "conchies". As regimental as a button-stick when marching them from the place of detention to the railway station. "They ought to be shot out of hand," murmur those who look at the men I am taking to Wormwood Scrubs. No sooner had the train cleared Merthyr than I moved to the corner farthest away from the two conchies, whose brother was I under my uniform. They sensed as much. After wishing them good-bye and good luck before sighting the gate of Wormwood Scrubs, I handed them over and returned to London to spend the night there, suffering a war-time show, before returning to Merthyr.

The young and smart recruiting officer is called back to his unit, leaves his comfortable quarters in the Castle Hotel, and his place is taken by an elderly gentleman in a brand-new uniform. This old gentleman did not like too many soldiers about him whilst he was engaged in "combing the district" with a small-toothed comb for recruits and "slackers", so he sent all us uniformed recruiters and orderlies back to our units.

At the Depot the doctor marked me B1. As such I was almost immediately posted to a provisional battalion on the east coast of England, where it was hoped that the work near the sea would soon tune us up to A1. In billets along the east coast the "combing out" of the fit soldiers went on, and drafts

were returned to France from time to time—and my time was coming.

There were days when from the window of my billet I looked out on to the parade-ground, beyond which was the sun-kissed sea. At the end of the parade-ground nearest our billet was a framework from which a number of Jerry Straws hung. At the other end of the parade-ground an athletic figure in blue and white was lining up sections of four recruits for bayonet charges across the parade-ground. He accompanied each four, shouting commands. Each section bayoneted Jerry Straws in various positions before finishing up with the final thrust at the Jerry Straw hanging from the framework. "At the stomach, *thrust*. Nothing like it." The figure in blue and white would roar: "Sling me your rifle and bayonet. Watch me!" Then he would charge the dummies, grunting fiercely, his face transformed into a picture of furious hate as he went flying through the air to viciously thrust before landing on his feet. "That's what I want, and that's what I'm going to have if I've got to keep you here till dark. First four into position again."

I walked the Norfolk lanes, thinking. The other chaps, most of them, went to the village pub. I walked alone, thinking—every woman I saw a "remember Laura" sign, every Norfolk child a reminder of my own four children. The last, another boy. Had named him Lawrence, had he been a girl it would have been Laura. "At the stomach, *thrust*." Well, couldn't I shout? Hadn't I had plenty of practice in the recruiting campaign? Voice like a bull, hadn't I? Maybe I was a bit old for the course necessary before I was authorized to stand in blue and white and shout "at the stomach, *thrust*".

First to a Brigade School of Instruction for N.C.O.'s, at which I was the oldest, yet the star pupil. The school commandant strongly recommended me for further courses. Musketry, Drill, Physical Training and Bayonet Fighting courses I took; and I returned to my unit from the best army schools with the best certificates obtainable. Stripe by stripe to sergeant instructor in nearly all branches of military art—one of the indispensable of the home front. Recruits and cadets trembled at the sound of my voice.

I was taking a course of P.T. & B.F. at Bordon when the letter came to inform me that brother Dick had reached London, St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, with a shell-shattered hip. On my return to my unit on the east coast I found Dave's letter awaiting me. He had been recom-



mended for the D.C.M., and for a R.S.M.'s course at the Guards' Depot, Chelsea. Before taking the course he was spending ten days with the old folks at home. Could I get leave? Three days I managed to get, for I was in orders for another course. Dave told me how he had won the D.C.M., and how things were going in France. His girl, now a qualified hospital nurse, was home, so it wasn't a lot of brother Dave I saw.

I was in Newmarket, on yet another course, when I received the letter from home which said that Dave had been killed in action. There I was, marching a platoon about the Downs under the eyes of officers and instructors, whilst Dave, our Dave . . . There were racehorses with hunched figures up, cantering, walking . . . Our Dave. There was a Captain Palmer, of Huntley & Palmer's, someone had told me, saying: "Splendid, Sergeant Jones. You handled that platoon very well, very well, indeed. Dis-s-s-miss."

On my return to my unit I applied for a few days' leave to go to our mam. Only three days, they said I could have, for I was down for a P.T. & B.F. Refresher Course at Brentwood, Essex. Home to our mam. "Well, John," she said.

"Mam fach!"

She didn't cry, just sighed: "We'll remember this old war, John. Poor Dave fach. Your father's been breaking his heart, for it was after your father he was named. Then that poor gel . . . They were talking about getting married as soon—but there it is. Come and have a bit of food, my boy."

As soon as dad saw me when he came in with Ike from his work in the pit, he started to cry, and it was then I noticed how old he was getting to look. What could I say to him?

"Dave, my Dave," he was crying. Billa's oldest boy's name was David Richard, but not one of my boys was named Dave; but I made up my mind to name the next boy, if there was to be a next, David. Just David, and nothing more, after dad and our Dave. Mam had a pint of beer in for dad to have with his taters an' meat, but he didn't drink much of it. Neither did he eat much of his taters an' meat, pushed it away and reached for his pipe. I told him to wash all over and we'd go out for a walk together. "Yes, go for a bit of a walk with John," mam said.

We went for a walk down town, the now oh so quiet town, the town which by now had lost so many of its sons and husbands and fathers. Plenty of soldiers about. I made dad come in to have a pint of Mitchell and Butler's beer, which he

used to like more than any other beer. But now he didn't seem to like it much ; neither did he talk much. " Don't let's go into the bar, John," he said. So we went into the little room behind the bar. " Is this your son, Davie ? " the landlord said when he brought a pint for dad and a half-pint for me. " Ay," dad said, and that was all. Didn't reach for his pint like he used to. After the landlord had gone I picked up my half-pint and tried to think of the best thing to say. All the stock things seemed so damned silly, so I said : " Drink up, dad." He drank a little, then started crying : " My little Dave." So I took him home.

When I was on the refresher course at Brentwood I spent my week-ends in London, so as to have Dick's company, and he have mine, for a few hours each week-end. He had had one operation, and was waiting another, the final, to get a plate fixed to hold the hip-joint in place. Then, with one sole of his boots thicker than the other he might be able to make a go of it, he thought. We used to talk of home, of Billa, and our Dave. Dick was the last of our family to see Dave alive, for Dave, with his rifle and pack, went to the hospital to say s'long to Dick just before leaving London on the boat-train. So Dick saw him last of all of us.

One day when I went into St. Mary's Hospital after writing to tell Dick I was coming, he had a cutting from a newspaper waiting for me.

" What do you think of our dad and mam parading with the troops at Cardiff, our Johnny ? " he said.

" Parading ? What do you mean ? "

" Read that. Had it from home this morning. Don't know where they get the *six* sons from, for only four of us—can't count our Ike for he was sent home." I read the cutting.

## KILLED 16 GERMANS

### D.C.M. HANDED MERTHYR PARENTS TO-DAY

At Cardiff Barracks, in the presence of a full muster of troops and the band, Colonel L. Beynon, C.B., commanding the No. 4 District, Shrewsbury, presented Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Garth Terrace, Penydarren, Merthyr, with the Distinguished Conduct Medal won by their son, the late Company Sergeant-Major D. Jones of the Welsh Regiment. The official record stated that the late sergeant-major was awarded the medal "for conspicuous gallantry and devo-

tion to duty during an attack. Reorganizing part of his company, which had become detached, he led them forward, and regained touch with the main body, and afterwards, with four privates, he attacked and captured an enemy strong point, and killed the garrison. He showed fine qualities of resource and initiative."

Sergeant-Major Jones, one of six brothers to join the colours, was subsequently killed. In the attack for which he was awarded the D.C.M., it is known that he alone killed 16 Germans with hand grenades. The relatives have also received a certificate from the general commanding their son's division.

"That was our Dave," Dick said with proud sadness as he took the newspaper cutting after I had read it.

"He alone . . ."

"Eh?"

"Nothing. How's your leg coming?"

"Not so good. They don't tell a man anything. Poor old Dave. I hope our Billa gets through; he's the only one of us that's managed to keep whole up to now. Do you think you'll manage to stay the distance on this side, John?"

"I'm having a good try."

"Keep trying; for that place I was carried out of—but there, you know. Lord, I wish I was able to come out with you to-night. I bet London's a fine place."

"Not bad; nothing like Merthyr, though."

"No fear it isn't. Our mam's in Merthyr."

"And London isn't what it was for us chaps; full up with Colonial and American soldiers. We chaps will soon have to apply for a special pass to share it with 'em."

Dick reached for his wallet. "Money's the special pass, John. Here."

"No."

"Take it, I tell you. Damned stuff's no good to me in this bed. Go on, don't be silly."

"I tell you I've got money."

"A fat lot, with Laura and the four kids. Take this—shut up. Do you want everybody in the ward to know?"

I took the money. Dick was looking at the fat Jewish mother and sisters who were talking a mile to minute to the wounded Jew boy in the next bed. "Me and him haves our little gamble every day," Dick said. "I'm a fiver to the good, but I'd give that and another five with it to have mam and our Blod' and



Mary Jane round my bed every visiting-day. His jam's in, for his mother lives here."

"How do you gamble when neither of you can get up?"

He explained how he and the Jew boy, each with his own pack of cards, gambled the days away. "Never mind, mam's coming up to see me next week."

"Yes, and I can't get here. She'll be here the day after I reach Parkhurst, Isle of Wight."

"Never mind, John. You carry on telling them cadets the tale, then you'll stand a chance of seeing plenty of mam when it's all over."

"Is it ever going to be all over?"

"The first seven years'll be the worse." His face twitched as his eyes swept the ward. "Some bad cases in this ward, John. That feller in the next bed but one's got— Still, haven't we all? And isn't there hundreds, if not thousands of places like this, where knifing and patching and bandaging and probing and God only knows what is going on night and day? Makes me—and now they say I'm to go under another operation. If they'd let me go home, our mam would soon make my leg right. If only I could get out of this place. You see, John, in the night . . ."

"Ay, I know."

"Anyway, I'm alive, that's one thing. So I mustn't grouse, must I? It isn't often I do. But on visiting-days when that Jew boy's mother and sisters walk in through that door with their faces like the rising sun—"

"Never mind, our mam'll be here next week."

He blinked his eyes, and rubbed his nose and swallowed, then he forced a smile. "Can't they talk?" he said, inclining his head towards the Jewish mother and sisters around the boy in the next bed. "All together—and they don't stop from the time they come in to the time they're as good as dragged away from him. Brings him truck-loads of stuff . . ."

The Jewish mother was helped down the stone steps by her daughters after we were all, the visitors, I mean, turned out of the ward. The Jewish mother was crying, and one of the daughters was complaining. "You always cry, why come if you always cry all the way home?"—"He don't see me, my boy don't see me cry."—"But you do cry and cry and cry . . ."

After booking a bed and breakfast for which I paid ninepence at the Chevrons Club, I went along to Drury Lane Theatre, where the British National Opera Co., I think it was, were singing "Cavelliera Rusticana" and "Pagliacci", as I spell

them. Sir Thomas Beecham conducted, I believe. Frank Mullings and—wasn't it Alfred Heather?—singing the leading tenor rôles. All very soothing, for the killing was so tuneful and temporary. Then there was no smell such as depressed one in that long ward of St. Mary's, Paddington, where I had left Dick to face his next operation. *Next.*

That ward is quiet now, I thought as I walked along through the ordered and dangerous darkness towards the Chevrons Club. Nearly midnight. Menaced quietude. A ward and a wood. Dick in the ward; Dave buried in Mametz Wood. Was he buried? Was my dearest brother's body rotting uncared for on some patch of no man's land, where the rats . . . "Laugh Punchinello . . ." Dad used to sing to Dave when he was small; and I as a small boy nursed Dave in the shawl, Welsh fashion. Now I'm in London's ordered darkness, above which the sky may at any moment be made terrible. Acts of God? Lightning; thunder; earthquakes; tidal waves, why, they are nothing. We can show God a thing or two.

In the ordered darkness haggling preludes to unions of two bodies. Sex-starved, blood-drunk soldiers saying: "All right, don't let's stand here arguin' the bloody toss. Where'll we go?" Caverns of light in the ordered darkness. Uniformed figures standing close up to women. Back in the caverns of light, where softly sweet music and . . . Darkness. Alone in London? Seems like it. No, here's a woman, one of the women who helped to win the war. She had a room, she told me. A room where she would give me a good time, she said. Said she preferred soldiers to "blasted civilians. Shirkers."

I hurried on. "Shirkers?" Well, wasn't I trying to dodge my way alive into the peace. "At the stomach, *thrust.*" Playing for safety. "On the word one . . ." Drill books, manuals. Keep eyes open for new courses and refresher course. Take 'em all, bring back the certificates. Anything less than "V.G." and you're lost, you're for the next draft. "Good-bye, sarge. All the best." Not bloody likely.

Peace. PEACE. At last, in my thirty-fifth year, in civilian attire and with my wife and four children, I go to Merthyr to see mam and dad. Dick is home, wearing a special boot. Billa is home, looking ever so old. Do I look as old as our Billa. A glance at my reflection in the mirror convinces me that I do. Dad looks very old. How old is he? Of course, he's sixty. Seems only the other day—

"Come on, draw up to the table," mam said. Our mam. Looks well.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MEDALS—A MENTION—AND A LITTLE MONEY

ALL of us with the exception of our Dave were with our mam for Christmas of 1919. On the wall of the room where we sat at dinner Dave's Distinguished Conduct Medal was in an oval-shaped frame, and the certificate from the general of his division was in another, square frame. On the certificate Dave's bravery was stressed.

"How many medals has our family got altogether?" I think it was Blodwen asked. We counted. There were Dave's three: the D.C.M., British War and Victory medals. Then there were my three: the 1914 Mons Star, British War and Victory medals. Billa and Dick had a couple apiece, so our family had about ten medals in all.

I also had some papers to show interested persons, for in addition to the mention in despatches, there was a message from a general still alive which thanked me for "the magnificent work you have done in defeating our enemies and protecting our homes in this country". Then there were about a half-dozen testimonials from officers commanding cadet battalions, provisional units, and recruiting stations, all of whom testified to my being this, that and the other.

After we had counted our medals and things, having nothing better to do between dinner and tea, we went on to talk of bravery and decorations. Having seen Fuller win our regiment's first V.C. in the great war, I was relating how we were charging uphill when Captain Haggard was hit, and Fuller picked him up like a sack of flour and carried him back to where——

"Oh, for Christ's sake give it a rest," cried Dick. "Bravery in war? There's no such thing. Everybody going out to kill or be killed is either mad, or windy. Come on, John, let's go for a walk."

He wanted to test his special boot, so leaving Laura and the children with mam I went out with him, and whilst we were



out I showed him the last letter received from our Dave, in which he said : " Jack, you are a lucky chap to be out of this. Mind you, I do not for a moment think that you have not done your bit. Once out here is enough for any man. But some of us have got to do more than a bit. In fact a lump . . . My medal I am certain of, if not something greater. But as I told you before, please do not speak of it. I see so many photos in the papers, and so many accounts of daring-do, that I, who knows the strength of the game out here, get sickened."

Dick said as he handed me the letter : " That from our Dave, who had more guts than any of us, proves what I was saying in the house. My old gammy hip's sticking it pretty good, John."

Yes, he wasn't limping so badly. Walking home from Pont-sarn. Two ex-killers out testing a shell-shattered hip after it had been repaired. Plate, special boot, slight limp, and it is the so quiet afternoon of Christmas Day, 1919. The stump of my shell-shortened finger is blue, almost black with the cold, and I try warming it with my hot, steaming breath. I had seen Miss Roberts, the hospital nurse Dave was going to marry when the war was over. Nice girl. Yes, one of the best. Dave . . .

In one attack " he alone killed 16 Germans with hand grenades ", and the general had said to our mam : " You should be proud of your son, Mrs. Jones." But our mam, who had had twelve children, nine of whom she had reared to be men and women, never reared our Dave to kill 16 Germans with hand grenades. For our mam loved all the children in Tai-Harry-Blawd, irrespective of nationality. Welsh to the core though she was, she used to smile on the McGill, Flannery and Scott children who lived in Tai-Harry-Blawd. Not until she had seen " What Price Glory ? " and other war films did she realize what four of her boys had been up to in France and Belgium. She never reared us for *that* ; she hadn't begged in distant valleys to feed us through the '98 strike so that we could kill 16 Germans with hand grenades. She carried baskets of food on her head up the side of one mountain and down the side of the other so that there should be life, not death.

Our Dave wasn't what you might call " a killer ", either, not by nature, I mean. When he was small he used to go singing around the houses on Christmas Eve with me and Billa and Frank. We sang :

“ Oh, merry, merry, merry Christmas bells,  
Oh, sweetly, sweetly chime,  
Let your happy voices on the breezes ring,  
Oh, merry, merry Christmas time.  
Peace on earth, goodwill to men,  
While angels sing, and sing again,” etc.

That's what our Dave sang as a lad in front of houses on the eve of many a Christmas. When a grown man he used to play with my children in a way—well, like a big kid. No, he wasn't a killer by nature. Yet he alone, in that one attack so the report says, “ killed 16 Germans with hand grenades ”.

“ Take that—and that, you bastards,” I had heard more than one of our chaps shout when sending a few over. Such language. The killing business has its own language. You see, there being no audience worth speaking of, the bayoneteer and the grenadier have to supply their own vocal encouragement to work themselves up in the dawn of the morning. Mad howls end with : “ Got you, you lousy swine,” as the bayonet goes in and comes out, one—one-two. Cold steel, that's the stuff to give the bastards. “ Take that—and that, you f\*\*\*\*\* c\*\*\*\*,” as the hand grenades are lobbed or overhanded to where they will explode near cowering groups of men. “ Let 'em have it, boys.”

In the dawn of the morning, war's rush hour, frightened men rushing to kill each other. Shouting in an effort to conquer the paralysing fear. A few, maybe more than a few, manage to rid themselves of the frightened civilized man, and the cunning and fearless animal controls the body's actions. They are the men who shine in war.

So I thought in the quiet of the Christmas afternoon, and when seated with the others at mam's table at what one might call the stocktaking Christmas. Count your many medals.

“ Had a nice walk ? ” said mam, who was sitting with Laura beside her, and the children about her. She was nursing our new baby, our fifth child, whom we had named David. Mam and Laura, even though Laura could not speak a word of Welsh, were like mother and daughter. “ Mother ”, Laura called her ; and she called Laura “ my gel ”. Laura was the only daughter-in-law mam had now, for Frank's Rosie, and Billa's Annie, had both died the year the war started. Here were two of poor Annie's boys, now part of mam's second family. And had poor Rosie's baby lived, she would have had that too.

Dad, who by now was getting over the death in action of our

Dave, was ready dressed to go out for a stroll with Billa. Neither of them wanted tea, for they were off to the pub for the evening session of Christmas Day. So we weren't as many to tea as we had been to dinner, for my two married sisters and their husbands and my youngest sister's boy, Frank, who had been named after my dead brother Frank, had gone to their own homes, which were not all that far from our mam's house. I was the only one living, as mam said, "out of her sight".

The family, that's what I couldn't help but think about as we had late tea in batches. "Let the children have theirs first," mam said. I sat holding my baby, David, on my lap whilst Laura helped mam to stuff the children. Dick, smoking a cigarette, sat on the old three-legged stool, from where he smiled at me with the baby on my lap. "Getting used to that game, John," he said.

"He should be, for he nursed you in the shawl," said mam from where she stood sharing two jellies into six portions for the six children at the table. Ike from the passage-way shouted to ask if she thought he should wear his thick scarf. "Of course," she said. "But don't go until you've had tea."—"Haven't got over my dinner yet," he said as going.—"Don't give them kids all the jelly, mam," said Danny.—"Two more in the pantry," she said. "Plenty of jelly—plenty of everything, thank God."

Laura and me and the children went to the pictures with mam to spend the afternoon of Boxing Day, the last day of our stay, for we were catching the seven-o'clock train for Pontypool. "Plenty of time to have food before going to the train," mam said as we left the cinema, outside of which hundreds of people were queued. "Nothing but pictures now," mam said. "I didn't use to care much for 'em, but once Jacky was able to read the writing for me it was better. But it's the threeatre I likes best—though not this old twice-nightly they've been having lately. All bits and pieces; no sooner in than you're out again. I remember the time—John can tell you, Laura—when we used to go into the threeatre as soon as the doors opened at seven, and stay there till nearly 'leven for sixpence. Five long acts. Real solid plays . . ."

Laura listening with her mouth open; carrying our baby, not in the shawl Welsh fashion, but the new way that our mam didn't hold with. "Carrying babies like parcels from Lipton's," she said it was. "Can't wonder at Laura, for I s'pose that's how they carries children about in Builth where she was



brought up. But there's gels bred and born here in Merthyr carrying babies like if they was parcels from Lipton's, John ; perishing 'em in little shawls that are more fringe than shawl. Oh, they wouldn't be seen with a Welsh shawl round them and the baby, same as I nursed mine—and same as you nursed 'em too."

Only another hour of her company and talk before leaving for where I was next thing to a stranger. No mam there to run to.

"Mam," I said, "I've a good mind to move back to Merthyr."

"Not if you're wise, my boy. Merthyr's not the place it was by a long way. Pits are not working more'n half their time——"

"They're not working much more over where I am."

"Then there's talk of the Cyfarthfa Works closing down for good."

"All the rest are here with you."

"To be sure ; where else would they be ?" Then in Welsh she murmured : "Remember when you lived in Merthyr before, John, and the mess you made of things ? Well, there's more of that gambling in Merthyr now than ever before."

In Welsh I replied with : "That goes on everywhere, mam."

Laura was looking inquiringly. "I was telling John, my gel," said mam in English, "how bad the work have gone here."

So back to Pontypool we went ; and it was August Bank Holiday when next we saw mam. My two married sisters, she told us, had gone with their husbands for the day to Weston-super-Mare. "I'm glad the weather's turned out so nice, for Frankie, our Mary Jane's little boy, have never been to the seaside before."

Neither had my children been to the seaside. There was eight pounds of my gratuity left, so as soon as we had said good-bye to mam, and the train was rushing us back to Pontypool, I said to Laura : "We're taking the children to Weston-super-Mare to-morrow."

"But there's work for you to-morrow."

"I know, but I'm not going to the pit to-morrow. We're all going to Weston."

So we did. With five of the eight pounds left from my gratuity in my pocket, we took the train to Newport, and the boat from there across to Weston. Our little girl, called Mary

one day, and Lizzie the next, which made me call her M.E., had new shoes for the trip. Laura had wanted to take our food for the day in a basket, to save buying, but I said no. "Not likely. This is the first day out we've had together, so it's going to be done in style." Laura was forty years of age, yet she scurried about the ship like an excited child with the four children, with me in the rear carrying the baby. We had a lovely crossing.

Before we had been an hour in Weston Laura said: "I'm beginning to feel hungry."—"I feel I could eat two cooked dinners," said Clifford, the most hungry-gutted of our five.—"Hold this baby a minute," said I to Laura. I left them to go and talk to the first of the line of drivers of open carriages for hire. Knowing Laura's love of the country, it was out to the country they were all to be taken for dinner. The man said he knew of the very place, a little country pub where there was an orchard outside the window of the room in which meals were served. "The best dinner of any place in Somersetshire," said the man.—"Drive us there," said I.

"How much will it cost?" whispered Laura, as I helped her with the baby in her arms into our carriage. "Money and fair words." With their backs to the driver and his horse sat Glynne and Clifford, with M.E. between them. Opposite them me, with young Lawrence on my lap, and Laura, with baby David on her lap. Clop, clop, went the horse's hoofs. I began to sing. "Shush," said Laura.

Laura had cider to drink with her dinner, and it went to her head. Dinners and drinks for the driver—who drank two pints of beer with his bread and cheese—and ourselves only came to nine shillings. Beef, tender, and plenty of it, potatoes and greens and pudding to follow—oh, a grand dinner. Baby David had his Allenbury's food, after which he slept. His bottle, with the clean and dirty napkins, we carried in a paper carrier. We walked under the fruit trees in the orchard after dinner.

The man drove us slowly back to Weston, where I settled up with him, he only charged us six shillings. "A shilling a head, we'll say nothing about the baby."

"I should think not," muttered Laura, as we moved off along the front to where a band was playing. "We're spending fine."

"What's the matter, didn't you enjoy yourself?"

"The dinner was all right, but six shillings for the ride——"

"Shut up; let me have that baby to carry."

"I can carry him, thank you."

"So can I, give him to me, do you hear?" I shouted.

"Oh, you can have him."

She stood frowning at the sea, thinking more of the money we were spending than of the pleasure we were getting out of it. For what she said was: "There's a day after to-day, remember." The band stopped playing, and the boys wanted to take their shoes and stockings off to paddle in the sea. "Come on then." Soon I was leading the four towards the sea, Laura sitting back on the sands with the baby, smiling now again. For a couple of hours we played about on the sands.

"I'm beginning to feel hungry again," said Laura.

"And still feeling angry, I suppose?"

"No, not in the least."

"Then as soon as the children have their boots on we'll go and have the best to be had——"

"But not in a carriage and pair again."

"It was a carriage and one."

"Whatever it was, it cost us six shillings."

"Which was cheap."

"For them able to afford it, perhaps——"

"I thought we'd—— Here, honestly now, how long is it since you enjoyed your food like you did out there to-day?"

"Years and years. Perhaps you're right, perhaps it wanted a day like this to make the break clean between what's gone and whatever's to come."

"Of course it did—and am I to have a free hand for the remainder of the day?"

She smiled up at me. "Yes, carry on."

Down on my knees to the sand I flopped, and with face close to hers, whispered: "Whose girl are you?"

"Jack's girl," she said, and I felt—oh, I don't know how I felt as she said that for the umpteenth hundredth time. I was for ever asking her whose girl she was, and each time she assured me that she was "Jack's girl" I felt the happier for it. She was the only one to whom I had been Jack, and nothing but Jack, from the moment we first met. "John", she said then, was too old, "Johnnie" she thought kiddish, so she fixed on "Jack". My parents stuck to "John", my brothers and sisters to "our Johnnie".

"Go and get those children," Laura was saying.

I rounded them up and hurried them into their shoes and stockings to go to a restaurant where there was a table which looked as though it had been reserved for us, for there were six



chairs, and a wide window-ledge for Laura to put all the things on. Laura ate a huge tea. "I hope," she said, "that it won't be rough going back. If it is, I'm afraid I shall—though I still feel I want more to eat." I called the waitress.

As we were going down the steps on to the boat that evening the heel of one of M.E.'s shoes somehow got stuck, and as she tugged, her shoe came off her foot and fell down into the water. "Only got them her yesterday," sighed Laura. "What'll we do now, Jack?"

"Buy her a pair of something in one of those shops near the docks." Rope sandals were all we were able to buy her to finish the journey in. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night when we got home; my arms and back aching, for I had carried both M.E. and young Lawrence up the hill from the railway station to the house.

"Home, thank goodness," said Laura.

After the children had been put to bed, Laura and I had a cup of tea together. "Now that it's all over, I'm doubtful whether it was worth while."—"Of course it was," she said.—"Do you really mean that, Lol?"—"Indeed I do." I reached for her hand. "Whose girl are you?"—"Jack's girl."—"For always?"—"For as long as you're willing to put up with me. Drink your tea."

Lucky for Laura and the children that they had that day's outing before the last of my war-gratuity was spent, for many a year was to elapse before she was to enjoy another outing. The slump which preceded the 1921 mining stoppage had us wanting food in less than six months after I had scattered nearly a fiver of my war-gratuity between where we lived and Weston-super-Mare. Short time at the pit, and trouble brewing everywhere. Sankey Commission's Report; the formation of a Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and some other strong trade union to fight for this, that and the other. "Hands off Russia"; and the evil of coal reparations; and the end of Government control of the miners causing the mine-owners to demand that our wages be greatly reduced. "Get ready to fight."

Newspapers full of reports of upheavals. There was no peace—and that there wasn't peace and plenty I was realizing. Three shifts a week was all the pit was working, and there were days when there was not even bread in the house. The end of winter, and the children wanting boots, and Glynne wanting Scott's Emulsion. Going deeper and deeper into debt, until at last I was as bitter as gall, and ready for anything.

First I sold my books to Bob Trump, who had a bookshop near Pontypool Market. Mostly shilling *Everyman's* and Nelson's Sixpenny Classics. Mr. Trump gave me fourpence apiece for the shilling *Everyman's*, and tuppence apiece for the Sixpenny Classics. For a number of odd volumes which I myself had bought second-hand he gave me a penny apiece. All gone, and the money I got for them was also gone before night.

Then Laura's piano, which her mother had bought at a sale in a gentleman's house when Laura was a little girl. It was a heavy, upstanding Broadwood with thick legs in front. Laura had played it on Sunday afternoons to accompany the singing of her mother and sisters. One by one the singers had died, and now only Laura and the old-fashioned piano were left. Now the piano must go, for the children, and Glynne especially, must have the things they were so badly in need of. When the man came with two other men to take Laura's piano away, she went upstairs out of the way to cry, for she couldn't bear to see it going out of the house. The man left a cheque for ten pounds, most of which was spent on the children that same week-end. The children had the clothes and boots they needed, and Laura had a pair for herself—and not before they were wanted either.

Again we were as badly off as before, so one fine day I walked over the mountains to Merthyr to see our mam, who gave me a pound and train-fare back home, which was all she could spare. For things in Merthyr were even worse than in Pontypool. Only Billa and Ike working short time; and dad and Dick and Danny without any work at all. Dick, unable to find the light work, which was all he was capable of owing to his shattered hip, started as bookmaker in a small way. He gave me ten shillings; and mam, in addition to the pound in money, gave me a bundle of clothes which she knew Laura could make something out of for the children.

Talk about hard times. One day when I was borrowing a shilling from a chap who was an I.L.P.'er, I burst out crying like a kid. "No good crying," he said, "for wars have got to be paid for, you know." He hadn't been to the war, but home working underground, and a member of The No Conscription Fellowship and things like that. "You ex-service men came home expecting to have everything on the plate, didn't you? And here you are without bread in the house." He invited me to a meeting, and I went, and heard a speaker, whose name was Noah Ablett, talk on "Who Are The Coalowners?"

So that's how I started in politics, with a group which had

broken away from the I.L.P., and was now waiting for the Communist Party of Great Britain to be formed so that we could get a move on. In less than a month after joining I was on the stump telling all within sound of my voice what I thought of a Government which had treated us ex-service men the way I said it had. I said—but what didn't I say?



## CHAPTER XIX

### “UP THE REDS!”

LIKE most other ex-service men I received, a month or so before the mining stoppage of 1921 commenced, an invitation from the military authorities to join up to serve, with full sergeant's pay and all allowances, for the duration of the stoppage, which looked like causing a state of national emergency. "Like hell I will!" I shouted.—"What's the matter?" said Laura. I told her, and after telling her I went to a meeting at which I read the communication before tearing it into little bits.

The stoppage, which was inevitable because of the mine-owners' insistence on a big reduction of wages, commenced, and I threw myself into the work of establishing soup-kitchens. I spoke at meetings in a way as impressed the majority that I was the man to send as their delegate to conferences. The miners' lodge of which I was a member received an invitation to send a delegate to represent the Lodge at the Formation Conference of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which was to be held at Manchester. Officially the Lodge, being part of an organization affiliated to the Labour Party, could not send a delegate, said the chairman. So the left-wingers decided that I should go anyway. All that was required was rail-fare, for hospitality, the circular stated, was being provided, but it didn't state by whom. "Delegates will report to the Lancashire organizer pro-tem", who will, it was implied, "take care of them".

So to Manchester I went to help form the Communist Party of Great Britain out of the floating left-wing elements of the British Socialist Party; the Socialist Labour Party; the Shop Stewards' Movement; the I.L.P.; disillusioned ex-service men; Oxford and Cambridge men; and other grades down to Liverpool slum-dwellers.

The hospitality, I learnt on arrival at Manchester, was not the good old first-come, first-served, communal sort of hospitality, but "graded" hospitality. The "heads", those who

had convened the conference, and the pivotal men of the organizations it was hoped to smash, were accommodated at the Grand Hotel, in the huge banquetting-hall of which our deliberations were to be held. The rank-and-file delegates, such as myself, after we had reported to the address in Manchester where the pro-tem organizer had a pro-tem office, we were billeted in a number of small temperance hotels.

At the opening session of the conference the pro-tem chairman, "Wee Arthur MacManus", addressed us delegates, and the world at large through the representatives of the Press. As soon as he had finished speaking, the representatives of the Press were requested to withdraw; stalwart doormen were placed on guard outside both the entrances to the banquetting-hall; and in private we proceeded to accelerate the revolutionary tempo of Great Britain. Guarded from the world, several hundred delegates, making what MacManus in his opening address referred to as a "truly magnificent gathering of the representatives of the British workers", got down to brass tacks. Our Russian comrades, we were informed, had in ten days shaken the world, and there was no earthly reason why we shouldn't give it another shaking before long.

Looking around the banquetting-hall in which we were gathered for that purpose, I noticed many who did not appear as though they represented workers. There were a number of women, standing around with cigarettes in long holders, women who to me looked like the actresses I had seen on the stage of the theatre of my home town. Then there were all sorts and conditions of men. University graduates; Clyde-side riveters; South Wales and Durham County miners; railwaymen; dock labourers; and Cockney costers.

The latter sniffed, and angrily muttered: "Blimey, 'ear 'im," when William Mellor, turned out by Oxford and Saville Row, began to speak from the platform. To most of his proletarian listeners he was offensively patrician in appearance, manner and speech. "Yus, look at 'im." So polished, but polish was at a discount. It was a mistake to appoint such a high-born—if not high-born, then highly-polished—"comrade" as chairman of the standing orders committee at a conference so proletarian.

J. T. Walton Newbold, realizing that, took the bull by the horns, so to speak. For he at once proceeded to beat us proletarians with many stripes. Told us that it was not by snarling and snapping would the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

be established in Britain. Before we ran around bleating "capitalism, capitalism", it was necessary for us to realize all that the term implied. Then he went on to talk of "the ramifications of capitalism" until we were all dazed. Through the maze of the international banking system he led us. Western and Eastern Europe, the Near and Far East, the Americas and the British Empire. He talked standing with his back to the wall, from where he walked out, leaving us stunned, as soon as he had finished speaking. So he did not hear Jack Villiers Leckie's impassioned attack upon "the ideology of the intelligentsia".

Jack stood up for us workers against the intelligentsia. We, said Jack, hadn't come to that conference to listen to lectures by comrade Newbold—or any of the blasted intelligentsia. We knew 'em—ay, only too well. The Kautsky's, the——  
"Point of order, comrade chairman."

MacManus from the chair reminded Leckie and all present that we were there, not to divide into intelligentsia and workers, but, as comrade Lenin had rightly said, to create a united Communist Party. We were not gathered there in order to find new grounds upon which to differ, but to work towards agreement. To weld the scattered communistic elements of Great Britain into one mighty party. In his opening address from the chair, with the world's Press representatives present, his references to the last Congress of the Communist International had been necessarily guarded. But at that Congress Comrade Lenin had effectively dealt with the childish differences between the members of the British delegation; with the non-parliamentary attitude of the British Shop Stewards' movement; and the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. At the Moscow and Petrograd sessions of the Congress, Comrade Lenin dealt with the differences revealed by the speeches of Gallacher, Ramsay, Tanner, MacLaine and Murphy. Comrade Lenin's last words to the British delegation were: "First create your united British Communist Party." That's what we're here for, comrades. Comrade Leckie has the floor.

Comrade Leckie said that he would be the last to in the least delay the formation of a united British Communist Party; but we, the workers, had to be careful, for we had been betrayed again and again by people who with fine words for bait had hooked us. Now . . .

After days of talking the Communist Party of Great Britain was formed, and we all stood and sang The Internationale.



Fraternal greetings from our new-born Party was immediately sent to our Russian comrades, to whom we also addressed our application for membership of the Communist International. Our pro-tem officials, chairman, secretary, treasurer, etc., were now voted into office with acclamation. MacManus we made chairman, Albert Inkipin we made secretary; and they were requested to withdraw whilst we discussed the salaries to be paid them.

William Mellor, as chairman of the Standing Orders Committee, presided over what was a lively discussion. The chairman in his opening remarks said something which annoyed the Clydesiders, who called upon him to withdraw what they objected to, which he did. A Brummagem delegate rose to suggest that it might help towards a decision if delegates were informed of the actual financial position of the Party which had that day come into being. Perhaps the chairman pro-tem, or one of the members of the newly-elected executive . . .

The temporary chairman, William Mellor, looked inquiringly at an executive member, who was whispering a reply when a Tyneside delegate rose to say that the Brummagem delegate's suggestion was the daftest he had ever heard. How could a Party so recently formed have any financial position? The temporary chairman nodded his agreement. The Tyneside delegate assumed that our officials' salaries would be met out of members' contributions, and that was why he favoured the barest minimum.

Ellen Wilkinson objected to our officials being treated in that way. Asked us to consider what we were doing. Our officials would be continually on the move, in Scotland one day, maybe South Wales the next, addressing meetings and conferences. Were they expected to travel through the night from Glasgow to South Wales without any rest, not in a position to pay the extra for a sleeping-berth—

"Them's exes, not salary," interjected someone.

And were we, continued Ellen, going to make our officials go about the country without as much as the price of—well, say a toothbrush—

"Toothbrush?" chorused a number of delegates.

Willie Paul asked permission to say a word, and it was he disposed of the question by suggesting that it be left to the Party Executive to make adjustments when necessary, or words to that effect. Then MacManus returned to take charge of the conference. Before returning to our respective districts, the delegates of the different industries met separately in

different parts of the hotel. We miners' delegates met in one of the upstairs lounges, and it was there that I was appointed corresponding secretary pro-tem for my coalfield.

When we miners' delegates got down to the entrance hall of the hotel it was to find a row brewing. Some of our delegates, having had a few drinks, were singing at the top of their voices "The Red Flag" and "The Internationale" alternatively. In opposition there were a number of commercials staying at the hotel—augmented by a number of young men resident in Manchester—singing "God Save The King".

"To hell with you!" shouted our chaps.

"Why don't you clear out to Russia?" shouted the commercials.

"Come on, let's wipe the bloody floor with 'em," suggested one of our chaps.

"Just a minute, comrades," said one of our executive members. "Don't play into the hands of those who seek to discredit us. Will all comrades staying in the hotel retire to their rooms, and will those staying elsewhere in the city, and those travelling home to-night, get going? Come along, comrades."

The hotel manager and a few waiters were persuading the loyalist choir of commercials to return to the lounge or to their rooms as I left.

An hour later I was on the train which was rushing me home through the night to report what had transpired at the epoch-making conference in the city of Manchester, returning to play my part in the class-war. I had two penny notebooks in which there wasn't room for another word to be written, even the covers were blackened with my final notes. I looked over my notes whilst the three other delegates who were travelling most of the way with me slept. But I could not for the life of me sleep. So much had happened, so much had been said.

British capitalism, so I gathered at the conference, was as good as finished now that we had created a united Communist Party of Great Britain. Our class-enemies could now look out for themselves. Class-enemies? Evidently I must include men such as Captain Berkeley among my class-enemies from now on. Yet up to now . . . But probably I would as I grew more class-conscious.

Then the conference had, as some of the speakers put it, "liquidated" or "debunked" God. How about that?

Though never a regular chapel-goer, I had, from a child, turned to God most nights. That time when my broken leg was in plaster of Paris, under which the vermin had got to torture me through nights which seemed endless, I prayed, and was granted sleep, I believed. In that Cardiff work-house I prayed for a sight of my dad, and he came. On the South African veldt, in hospital and in military prison out there, I had prayed, and believed myself helped and strengthened. After the mad bout of gambling, when even our mam drove me from her door, God had answered my prayer with—so I believed—advice which directed me back to Laura. During the years at Builth, when I was struggling back up out of the hell into which I had landed myself, I believed that He was at my side. Those were the years during which I read a chapter of the Old and New Testaments most nights, sometimes reading aloud to Laura, nursing her baby, and her sister Lizzie on the bed so sweetly dying. In France and Belgium during the first three months of the Great War, I almost hourly commended myself and my dear ones to Him. During the years I was dodging from point to point of the Home Front, trying to preserve the life upon which Laura and her children depended, I had nightly put the case to Him. What was it our mam was always saying? “God is good,” and then again: “Yes, plenty of food, thank God.” But she was only an illiterate old woman, whereas those speakers at the conference who had “liquidated” God were scientific socialists, eminent Marxians—

“Never mind all that. The question is, are you going to say your prayers?”

I closed my eyes and, sitting, not kneeling, prayed silently; and after that my mind simmered down and I slept all the way to Pontypool Road.

. . . . .

“For the cause, indeed,” Laura murmured resentfully, as I was about to start off to Merthyr on a borrowed cycle. “Running off night after night when there is work, and off all day when the pit is idle; leaving me to see to the children. I hardly saw you when the strike was on, and now that it’s over you’re just as bad.”

“Shut up—and you needn’t wait up, for I expect I shall be very late.”

“Tell your mother I’ll come to see her as soon as I can manage to find money for train-fare,” she said as I left.



True enough, I admitted to myself, free-wheeling down the hill, it's little she's seen of me lately, for I had been running about here, there and everywhere, either to address meetings myself, arrange meetings for "national" speakers, or to form a branch, or nucleus of a branch of the Communist Party, which was my reason for going to Merthyr this day.

When I got to Merthyr I went first to our mam's house, where I found dad looking ever so old and depressed in the living-room. "John fach," he said. "Sit down, my boy. How's Laura and the children?"

"Fine, dad. Where's mam?"

"Hanging clothes out on the line—sit down, boy. Working?"

"About four shifts a week, that's all. And you?"

"No, not a tap of work since long before the strike—neither am I likely to have a day's work again, John, not now that they've closed Cyfarthfa Works for good." He sighed. "I don't know what things are coming to. A works famous the world over for a hundred and sixty years, and now—well, there it is. Ay—you mark my words, John—it'll be Dowlais Works next. My cousin—you know, your uncle in the Dowlais offices—told me that already they're sending a lot of the work down to the Dowlais-by-the-sea works at Cardiff. Then it'll be domino on everybody, young and old, in this place. Billa is the only one working in this house."

"Well, you've worked enough, haven't you?"

"Don't talk so damned dull, John. Why, I'm as good a man as ever I was."

He didn't look so good, but I let him talk. He was sixty-three, and from the age of eight he had been slogging at it down pits. Bald and peaked now, but as he went on talking I allowed my imagination to put the hair back on his bald head, and fill his face out until he was again the man who had carried me through the swamp of the old underground return to the surface in '96. There, he is the Davey Jones at whose heels I trotted through the darkness of that November morning. Every hundred yards or so a gas-lamp, in the light of which I look up to make sure that it is my dad. It is, for I can see the glint of the gold-wire ear-ring on my side. Between gas-lamps, where the darkness is unchallenged, I might have been jostled apart from him by the hurrying streams of workers. Mam enters to bring me back to the present.

"John fach."—"Hullo, mam." I kiss her on a cheek

rosy-red. Her hair is now grey all over, and she's a little dumpier.—“How's Laura and the children?”—“Fine.”—“That oldest boy, how's his chest now?”—“Much stronger.”—“That Scott's Emulsion is good. I know a woman—egg an' chips will you have?”—“No hurry, mam.”—“Must have food, boy—I won't be a minute putting it. Plenty of food, thank God. But how ain't you working?”—“No work to-day over there.”—“There's no work any day over here, not for your father and Ike, anyway. Drink this cup of tea whilst I'm getting the egg an' chips ready for you. By train did you come?”

“No; on a borrowed bike.”

“I was going to say that if it was by train you could have brought Laura and the children.”

“Out of what he earns in four shifts a week?” said dad.

“You likes your egg broke, don't you, John? Mary Jane was here early this morning to give me a hand with some blankets that wanted washing—— How many of 'em's going to school with you now?”

“All except the baby.”

“My namesake, you mean,” said dad. “Is he walking?”

“Is he walking? Of course he's walking,” said mam.

“Don't sit there moping any longer, but go and get dressed to go out for a walk with John now that he's here. Your father's worrying his guts out because they won't give him work, John.”

“I've been telling him that he's worked enough. All the same, I can't go for a walk with him, for I've got to see some chaps and form them into a branch of our Party.”

“Male voice party, is it?” said mam indifferently.

“No.” I went on to explain between mouthfuls, but it was only dad that listened. Mam sipped her tea and interjected with questions about Laura and the children.

“Well,” said dad, “I don't see much difference in that and what Keir Hardie used to preach, and what Dick Wall-head is preaching here now.”

I tried to explain the difference, but mam said: “What odds? What Keir Hardie preached Merthyr wouldn't listen to time of the War, but now they're listening again. So I don't bother my head with any of 'em. Go, I tell you,” she shouted at dad, “and wash and dress to go out for a bit somewhere. You can walk with John as far as Jane Hall's corner.” Dad went up the bathroom to wash. “John, he's breaking his heart because he can't get work. Not satisfied

unless he's working all the time, though he's worked enough—and hard enough, goodness only knows. And we'll manage somehow if he never works again, for I'm not without a shilling. Got any money in your pocket, John?"

"Yes, plenty."

"How much?"

"Plenty, I tell you."

"Plenty little enough with five children to keep out of four shifts a week. Put this in your pocket—take it, I tell you. Take your father in somewhere for a pint, and tell him not to worry. Then after you've done your business, mind to come back here for food. Remember now. There's a few things for the children that I'll make into a parcel to ride on the back of the bike."

So I took dad to where they sold Mitchell and Butler's beer, and when I left him he was feeling more cheerful.

After having started a communist "local" I went back to mam's for the bike, on the back of which, behind the saddle, she had fixed a parcel of things which she said Laura could make do for the children. Now the house was full, my married sisters and their husbands, my brothers and nephews. Dad had not returned from where I left him.

"What's this I hear about wanting to make the town communist, our Johnny?" said Dick, who didn't really want to know, being as non-political as the others living under mam's direction.

"Come to your food, John," said mam, "for you've got no time to bother with them." They were all getting ready to go out for the evening; and I was feeling rather sad because I was soon to ride away from them all. Still, Laura and the children were at the other end, though it was little enough of them I was seeing these days. "The Cause" was what took up every moment of my spare time.

There were so many "national" speakers being sent down from London for me to arrange meetings for, and provide hospitality for. I handled them at the rate of about two a week. Shop Stewards, Cockneys and Clydesiders. Ex-B.S.P.'ers; ex-I.L.P.'ers; ex-S.L.P.'ers, all of whom had combined to form the Communist Party's most able team of "national" speakers. Many of them were as able with the pen as with their tongues. The weird-looking and witty Tommy Jackson, editor, journalist, and speaker; but only indoors would he speak. It was no use putting him up on a box at a street-corner, or on some open space where his



humorous asides and afterwords were rendered ineffective by passing traffic. We all liked T. A. J.

Neither was Bob Stewart's voice able to stand much open-air work ; that I discovered when introducing him as Britain's first communist candidate for Parliament at the Caerphilly by-election in August of 1921. Bob's nose was badly dented, but above it he had a pair of merry eyes, his disposition was lovable, and he was as staunch a teetotaler as he was a revolutionist. From Dundee, I believe.

Joe Vaughan, of the Electricians' Union, was Mayor of one of the London boroughs when he came to speak at two meetings I had organized for him. He was one of the many "comrades" for whom Laura and I gave up our bed for a night or two. Joe was a nice chap who regarded his elevation to the position of mayor of a London borough as one of the greatest romances of all time, as perhaps it was. "I can hardly believe it, Jack," he more than once said whilst staying with me. "Me, an east-end kiddy, now sitting in the Mayor's parlour giving orders . . ." He was one of the few "comrades" Laura liked. "A nice man," she thought he was.

But she didn't think the caustic J. T. Walton Newbold "a nice man". At that time he was, to say the least, difficult. The man knew his stuff, as the saying is, and he knew only too well that he knew it. And the way he barked at those of us who organized meetings. "What are the arrangements? Have my meetings been well advertised?" When unable to complain about the size of the crowd, he would complain of its quality. "Had better response in a workhouse." Yet he was gladly suffered for his great knowledge, and it was good to have at least one "national" speaker who enjoyed "lashing" his audiences, for most of the others shed crocodile tears over their audiences.

Harry Pollitt was the Party's oratorical cyclone, the man who appeared to me to deliver an hour and a quarter's speech between one breath and the next, for once he commenced speaking he didn't appear to stop long enough to breathe until he sat down again. His speciality was "The International Situation", a revolutionary travelogue which included the world's political parties, their policies and personalities. Before leaving Britain he would analyse and pulverize the official Labour Party and the I.L.P. "So much for Henderson, MacDonald and Co." Then across to France to flatten out the leadership of the Socialist movement of that country

before starting for Germany. On his way to Germany he would break his journey at Geneva for as long as it took him to wreck the League of Nations. That done, through Europe to Russia, where the travelogue ended. "Long live the Russian workers! Long live Lenin! Long live the Communist International!" Then Harry would sit down and breathe again.

Old Tom Mann was more retrospective than his "young comrades". Starting from the Chartist movement he would work forward to the Russian Revolution. Old Tom had read more than most of his "young comrades", so he would wind up with an excerpt from Shelley or some other poet.

J. T. Murphy looked and spoke like a professor of philosophy. He was most explanatory, most anxious to make things perfectly clear. Unlike Harry Pollitt, who rushed us through Europe to Russia, Murphy would stop to explain what he meant by "revolutionary tempo", which takes some explaining.

Jock Wilson, who was appointed Party organizer for South Wales, was another rapid-fire talker. From time to time Jock would instruct us South Wales chaps to come to Cardiff to listen to a member of the national executive just back from Moscow with instructions from our international headquarters, and after hearing the one who had so recently sat at the feet of Lenin, we returned to our respective districts pledged up to the hilt to expose the "yellow labour leaders"; to intensify the struggle on all fronts; to work for control of the trades unions, the co-ops, everything but churches and chapels. Those boss-class institutions would, as the workers became more conscious of the materialist basis of society, collapse. So get to work, comrades. You arrange the meetings, we'll provide the speakers, said the national executive member.

R. Palme Dutt, Saklatvala, Helen Crawford, and scores of others I arranged meetings for. I met most of them again during the Caerphilly by-election campaign, when Bob Stewart was the first communist candidate. I took him out of the committee-rooms to address his first meeting as candidate, an open-air meeting, on "the Twyn", which overlooks the thirteenth-century castle built by Red Gilbert de Clare. There, on top of a table, I introduced Bob Stewart to the crowd as "the communist candidate".

Led by "Wee Arthur MacManus" every available communist speaker in Britain invaded the division. Few of them could pronounce our Welsh place-names, but the local printers

printed them correctly on the posters. The officials and headquarters staff came down from London ; and there were a couple of observers from abroad there to note the response of Caerphilly to the communist message. There was a lot of talk about "the revolutionary wave", which could not have reached Caerphilly, for the deposit money put down by us—or for us—was not picked up again, but was forfeited. Two thousand five hundred votes we polled, the propaganda value of which, our officials insisted, was simply enormous.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE RENEGADE

IT was Laura that drew my attention to the newspaper announcement that the membership of one of the Federation lodges wanted a full-time Secretary-Representative. "Ten shillings a day plus percentage," she said. "That's a good job. Why not apply? It'll only be the price of a stamp."

To please her I applied for the position, which I was convinced was "cut-and-dried" in the same way as most positions are before the advert is inserted. So I was surprised to hear some time later that I was one of a short-list of twelve selected to address the membership of the Lodge at Blaengarw on a Saturday evening. "That's the Saturday I'm attending the South Wales Miners' Federation conference at Cardiff, though."

"But the conference will be over about midday," said Laura.

It was. The conference lasted from 10.0 a.m. to 1.0 p.m., lasted long enough for me to cross swords with the President, Mr. Vernon Hartshorn, M.P., who annoyed me by addressing us delegates whilst seated in the high-backed presidential chair which is on the platform of the Cory Hall, Cardiff. "Point of order, Mr. Chairman," I interrupted with. "When addressing the chair we delegates stand, yet you are addressing us whilst seated, and in so doing you are creating an atmosphere like that of the House of Commons on one of its slack nights. Kindly stand when you address conference."

He rose to his feet and apologized.

We met on the train in which he was travelling to Maesteg, and I to Blaengarw, that same afternoon. "Oh, it's you," he said, with a smile. We met in the corridor. "Come on in here with me. Where are you off to?"

"To Blaengarw; on the short-list for a job there. You know Blaengarw?"

"I should think I do, it's part of my division. So you're on the short-list for Jack Williams's job? Do they know you're a communist?"

"Who told you I was a communist?"

"I inquired after you pulled me up in conference this morning."

"Then you know."

"But do the people at Blaengarw know?"

"Should do, for I stated the fact in my application."

"Well, if I were you, I shouldn't underline the fact when you're speaking at Blaengarw for the job this evening. Up to the end of the last strike most of them were voting Liberal there."

"Then how did you get into parliament?"

"Because my own area, the Maesteg area, was solid for me. I don't know why I'm advising you, for I don't want to be troubled with any of you communists in my division. But I liked the way you spoke in conference this morning; and I think the responsibility of an official job will bring you to your senses. Many in for it?"

"Over a hundred and sixty, out of which they've made a short-list of twelve. Two of that twelve have been speaking there each night this week; I'm one of the last two to speak."

"Here we are at Bridgend—I have to change here as well. Well, good luck to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Hartshorn." I watched him as he went forward to the Maesteg portion of the train. Little did I then think that he was destined to occupy positions in two Cabinets before—but everything in its proper place. At this time he was by far the ablest of our mining M.P.'s. In appearance he was reminiscent of the prosperous business man of Edwardian days. Rather full-faced, a face which carried a moustache that was a moustache, which he stroked occasionally when speaking in public. The only slight blemish in his appearance was the rather glassy stare of one of his eyes, due, he told me later, to his having grazed it with the point of a pick when working in the pit as a lad. "Good luck to you," he said; and after the way I had pulled him up that very morning before all those delegates, I thought that decent of him. I was to learn later that the man was above nursing a grudge.

In less than an hour after leaving him, I was speaking from the stage of the Workmen's Hall, Blaengarw, to a small percentage of the fourteen-hundred and odd men and boys I was later to serve as Secretary-Representative. Having spoken, and answered a number of questions, I made way for the next applicant, a graduate of the Central Labour College, London. He was about a dozen years younger than I, and he had had the benefit of two years' Labour College training, and the

Labour College graduates were favourites for the official positions in the Miners' Federation. Hadn't the brilliant Frank Hodges, after a brief period in this very district, stepped right up into the position of General Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain? And this young fellow was just such another as Frank, and had had the same training as Frank at the Labour College. So I've got no chance, was what I thought on the way home to Laura.

So it was a great and most pleasant surprise to me when the letter reached me to inform me that I had been appointed to the position.

"There," said Laura, "if I hadn't noticed that advert and made you write that day, you wouldn't have had the job."

From an uncertain thirty-shillings a week to a certain three-pounds ten-shillings a week—oh, what a stroke of luck. On the strength of it I took Laura and all the children over to Merthyr to our mam, who was delighted to hear of my good fortune. "You must have a suit to go tidy to that new place, John," she said. "For that you're wearing—well, it's not up to much now that you're miners' agent."

"It'll have to do until I can get money to buy another."

"We'll see about that," she said. There was a ready-made, navy blue double-breasted suit in the shop she took me to that fitted me like a glove. "There, that's better," she said, paying the man for the suit.—"I'll pay you back, mam," I said.—"I hope you will, indeed," she said.

There was that, and the money borrowed to pay for removing our furniture, to be paid back after I started my official career in the little dead-end mining township of Blaengarw, which is one of those places off the main line that the world at large knows very little about. You get out of the main line train at Bridgend, then by bus or train you travel for about ten miles through a narrow valley until you can go no farther, for the road and the railway line end at the foot of a high mountain. In the narrow valley there are two townships with a population of about sixteen thousand all told; and the men work in one or other of the half-dozen pits; go to one or other of the dozen chapels on Sundays; and to one or other of the half-dozen pubs on week-nights.

There are two elementary, and a secondary school in the narrow valley; also two cinemas and a Workmen's Hall. It is one of a dozen or more such valleys which are off the main lines of South Wales, and I merely mention a few facts about them because people who come into them from London say, as



a king once said : " I never dreamt things were like this." Communities tucked away in narrow valleys, down which, like bloated black snakes, coal-trains wriggle down to the main line, and out to the world. What happens in those narrow valleys is " small beer " to people resident in the capital cities of the world, I know, but were it not for those narrow valleys the capital cities of the world would themselves be small beer indeed.

Now here was I, one of the most prominent men in this narrow valley. In my little office which was under the stage of the Workmen's Hall I was available for twelve hours a day as adviser to the fourteen hundred and odd men and boys who worked on three different shifts. There was plenty to do from morning till night. Disputes which had to be taken up with the management of the colliery, compensation claims to be entered, meetings to address, contributions to receive and enter, committees to be called, and conferences to attend. Between everything, it was little time I had to spare for Laura and the children.

The elevation of a communist like myself to an official position in Britain's strongest industrial organization was regarded by the Red International of Labour Unions as proof of the beginning of communist control of the British Trades Unions. Instructions from Moscow, via London and Cardiff, reached me up in the dead-end of the narrow valley, where I was supposed to be, so the circular stated : " strictly subordinate to the Party in general ". Continue your exposure of the yellow Labour leaders ; work for affiliation to the Red International of Labour Unions, do this, that and the other, until at last I ignored the instructions and carried on as I thought best for those whose representative I was.

Few people still remember how in those days the noisy communist minority in the trades unions went about threatening to break those officials who dared to oppose them. They even threatened to upset the Trades Union Congress, into which they managed to force Tomskey, when chief of the Russian Red International of Labour Unions. So when I fought them in that little township of the narrow valley, I was fighting not only for my bread and butter, which my job meant to me and mine, but also for the right to do one's best for one's own people without dictation from Moscow. Yes, from Moscow.

Anyway, I held my position, and went forward as a member of the official Labour Party, a more or less sensible trades union leader of the third class. As such I attended a national miners'

conference in Blackpool, at which Frank Hodges, our general secretary, said he was sorry we had not, as delegates, seen our way clear to alter the rule which prevented him from standing for Parliament. Very sorry, he was, because he felt, as many of our mining M.P.'s also felt, he said, that if he was a member of the House of Commons he would be in a much stronger position to negotiate on behalf of the miners. Still, rules are rules, and there you are.

For about three years after that conference I hardly stopped talking. Three general elections in less than three years, two years and eleven months, to be precise. Out with Lloyd George and his Coalition Government to make way for Baldwin and his Conservative Government—that was the first. Out with Baldwin and his Conservative Government to make way for MacDonald and the first Labour Government—that was the second. Then out with MacDonald and the first Labour Government to make way for Baldwin and his Conservative Government again—that was the hat-trick. All stale news by now.

From November of 1922 to October of 1924 I must have addressed about a thousand meetings. When I went across to Merthyr to speak for Dick Wallhead I asked dad and mam to come and hear me speak—I was doing a number of outdoor shouts and one indoor meeting at the Oddfellows' Hall, Dowlais. "So you and dad go up by tram to the Oddfellows' Hall, mam."—"You eat your food," she said. Presently she asked: "What are you now then, John?"—"Labour, woman," said dad, who was getting ready to go to the Oddfellows' Hall to hear me speak.—"But them communionists was Labour too, I thought," mam said. "Talk you, John fach; but it's too much of a pull for me to go up to Dowlais. Try some of that teeshun-lap."

So it was only dad heard me speak at Dowlais that night, only dad out of our family, I mean.

Hartshorn had said in the autumn of 1922: "Jack, I'd like if you'd give poor old Mac a shout in the Aberavon district. Being an ex-service man yourself, you should do him a lot of good with the ex-service men of the division."

"With pleasure," I said, for the men whose industrial representative I was had appointed a deputy to act for me when I was away speaking for various candidates; and I had met "Mac", as we called him, one day in the train between Bridgend and Cardiff. He was very sorry for himself about that time, having been a few years in what is called "the political

wilderness", and he was hoping to find political anchorage in the Aberavon district, where the ex-service men's vote was floating between the patriotic past and the present depression.

So I went into Aberavon one very wet day to help to marshal an ex-service men's demonstration, at which, in the Park, Mac, myself and Colonel Dai Watts-Morgan were to speak. The Colonel had lost his voice, so he sent Mrs. Watts-Morgan to speak for him. With the rain washing the blue out of my suit to discolour my underwear, I formed each platoon of ex-service men up as they marched in from the mining valleys of the division. The wet and footsore regiment of about a thousand strong were marched past the Walnut Tree Hotel, from the balcony of which Mac took the salute ; and I thought it funny in a way that I should be shouting " eyes-right " to a man who the ex-service men, when they were serving during the war, would have hooted derisively ; which just shows what time, and especially short-time and unemployment, will do.

On my way to the Park, someone from the central committee-rooms came running to inform me that instead of going to the Park I was to go to Cwmavon in a car with two ministers of religion, and there keep a meeting going until Mac arrived. It was there I was speaking when he eventually arrived, and the cheering as he entered cut me off. So I sat down to listen to his speech, a sorrowful and soulful speech it was. " My friend, Jack Jones," he said, " has, I expect, already dealt with the mining situation." I had, and a good thing for him that I had, for it was little Mac knew about matters industrial. He was one of the magnetic platform personalities who are able to transcend—I think the word is—all the bread and butter issues. Standing there, with his hands to the lapels of his coat, he, from a great height as it were, let loose a torrent of musical but meaningless words on that large and expectant audience. There was something about him at that time which made us Welsh speakers look like a penny-a-bunch in that Welsh constituency. The best of us, at that time, hadn't an earthly chance of holding our own with Mac when sharing platforms with him. I remembered Keir Hardie, whose figure was not so impressive as Mac's. Neither of them keen on detail relating to policies—but " who's asking for more detail ? " The audience, experienced sermon-tasters most of them, had come to hear the speech which starts from where detail ends, and that was the sort of speech Mac was better able than any of us to supply at all times. As we old sweats say, " his stuff was the stuff to give 'em ".



From the political wilderness into the promised land in the space of one year. Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary and—well, no wonder it went to his head. Next time I saw him he was walking like a man whose backbone was made of cast-iron, and talking like the most petrified of civil servants. He was no longer “Mac” to us, but the Right Honourable Mr. MacDonald, etc., etc., which is perhaps how it should be. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, he had, between two visits, been transformed from the “Mac” we had known into the elder statesman who spoke of the “cares of office”.

Still, we miners had no real cause for complaint, for he certainly remembered us when forming his Cabinet. Gave us three places. Our mutual friend, Hartshorn, was made Postmaster-General; Steve Walsh, the ageing Lancashire miners’ leader, got the War Office; and William Adamson, the Scottish miners’ leader, got the Secretaryship of Scotland. But that wasn’t all. The Miners’ Federation, being the strongest single organization of the British Trades Union movement, also got a few of the lesser governmental positions. Frank Hodges, having taken the bull by the horns, burnt his bridges—or whatever you choose to call his going against the rule by standing for parliament—got the Civil Lordship of the Admiralty; and people were saying that in him they saw the Labour Prime Minister of the future. Jack Lawson, the Durham miners’ leader, got a financial secretaryship; so, on the whole, our Federation did very well. And the other trades unions also did pretty well. It was the co-op movement that was left in the cold, so to speak, but Mac remembered the co-op when forming his second Cabinet some years later.

However, I was more relieved than otherwise when, in 1924, Mr. Baldwin and his Government looked safe for five years. For if ever a man was sick to death of the sound of his own voice, then it was I. “We’ll be seeing a little more of you now, perhaps?” Laura said wearily. The doctor had advised her to have all her teeth extracted without delay, she said; and there was I sat having a good look at her.

For ten years, from the outbreak of the war in 1914 up to that moment, it was little of me she had seen. I hadn’t watched my children grow, hadn’t had much time for them. Now they were hardly my children, but hers, for it was she had had the care of them whilst I was in the army; and later stumping the country for the Communist and Labour parties. There she was sitting in the armchair, looking old. How old is she then? Of course, she’s forty-four—forty-five next birthday. Glynne,

my eldest boy, works at Pugh's shop, and I notice how he has grown. So has Clifford, who will be leaving the secondary school in a month. Lawrence and David have also grown, I notice; and M.E., quite the little woman with her apron on, is saying to Laura: "Sit where you are, I'll do everything."

"The doctor said that it's my teeth is causing the terrible headaches I've been having." I didn't even know that she had been having "terrible headaches", or that she had been to the doctor. "Poisoning me, he said they are."

The children stand around looking at her with eyes full of anxious love, at me they seldom look. First thing next morning I hurried down to see Dr. Bowen, who said: "Yes, your wife's badly run down. Then those teeth of hers, sooner they're extracted the better."

"Is there anything—well, serious, the matter with her?"

He thought for a minute before saying: "Serious enough, in a way. Her nerves are bad, her teeth are bad, and she's generally run down; in a state from which anything could develop. She'll certainly have to take care of herself."

Gave me a tonic for her to take. That evening I put off a meeting to hurry home to take her and all the children to the cinema. Then the next evening I went with her to the Medical Aid Society's dentist, who put her under gas to extract all her teeth. When she came with the nurse out of the room where the dentist had been working on her mouth, she hadn't a tooth in her head. She smiled foolishly with her sore mouth as I took her over from the nurse; and there was blood in the corners of her mouth. Her face was all sunken, and now she looked something like her sister Lizzie had looked when dying. With her arm in mine we slowly walked towards home. I was crying inwardly.

"How do you feel, dear?"—"Not so bad."

I felt like kissing the blood off her lips in the street in the sight of all the people; felt like carrying her on my back or in my arms all the way home, felt the need of doing something to make up for the ten years of neglect. Felt like cursing myself, like kicking myself—My Laura.

The children, all of them, were waiting for her, for her, not for me. They took her from me at the door and led her to the armchair. "How do you feel, mam?"

"Here's a cup of tea, mam," said M.E.

"Wait till I rinse my mouth out," said Laura, going towards the scullery, into which the four boys followed her.

"Drink this cup of tea," said M.E., as soon as Laura returned to the living-room.

"It'll be tea and sloppy food for the next few months," said Laura, taking the tea.

The children upstairs in bed, and Laura and I still down. It was time for my public-speaking lesson, for that was what I called my reading aloud from Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. For years I had, before going to bed, read aloud from that book, varying the speed, enunciating clearly and distinctly, with the dictionary near at hand for consultation on pronunciation. If when I arrived home earlier than usual the children were still down, I hurried them off to bed so that I could pose and practise. Pages of the book I used for the introductory parts of speeches; other parts for my perorations.

This night I did not reach for the book, but sat looking at Laura, who was seated in a low armchair, staring into the fire. Her now so hollow cheeks—where the hell have I been to all these years? "Mr. Chairman . . ." Night after night, revelling in wordy warfare with hecklers; lapping up applause whilst she, after the children had gone up to bed, sat staring into the fire, her lovely head aching, and—

I fell on my knees before her, my head in her lap, crying the bitter tears. She smoothed my hair. Presently I looked up to her and asked: "Whose girl are you?"—"Jack's girl," she said.

I kissed her hands—politics be damned! After years of stumping the country I reserved myself for Laura and the children. Declined invitations to speak outside the valley, and in order to have grounds for refusing speaking engagements outside the valley, I organized a sort of non-political educational campaign, during which I presented at Blaengarw and Pontycymmer on the same evenings, a number of famous people. Dr. Maude Royden was one of my speakers; dear old Bonar Thompson, the Hyde Park orator, was another. He gave us a recital of excerpts from Shakespeare and other dramatic writers. Hartshorn, whom we now advertised as "Ex-Postmaster-General", came from London to preside at Dr. Maude Royden's two meetings.

Having through one winter season provided the locked-in population of the narrow valley with something more than partisan political fare, I then went on to present theatrical productions such as the narrow valley had had to go as far as Cardiff for. As chairman of the Workmen's Hall Committee, I was empowered to devote my leisure time to the booking of



worth-while theatrical entertainment for presentation at the Workmen's Hall. I revelled in this. Starting off with a capable stock company, I went on to my first Shakespearian Festival. Edward Dunstan, a one-time London actor, and his company of 28 players I presented. What a wonderful week we had. Packed houses and such satisfying performances on our little stage, which Dunstan's stage manager did wonders with. Six evening performances and two matinées, the mid-week matinée of "Julius Caesar" for the older school-children of the valley.

After that busy week the communist nucleus charged me with neglecting my proper work to, as they inelegantly put it: "mess about with bloody actors". I had, said they, plenty to do representing men who were being taken advantage of by the colliery management whilst I was running around trying to persuade the people of the valley to come to the Shakespearian performances each evening. That was not my work, not what I was being paid for——

It was proved that I was not neglecting my proper work in the least, and that it was my leisure time that I was devoting to something for which I was not paid a penny piece, and which was profitable both financially and otherwise to the workmen's whose hall it was. That it was six thousand pounds in debt to the bank was not mentioned during the discussion, that being such a common thing, for most Workmen's Halls and Institutes, and many of the chapels in the coalfield as well, are, with most of the tradespeople, in the hands of the banks.

Again the communist attempt to discredit the "renegade" failed, but they swore to "get" me sometime, and communists never leave their men until they're cold, they reminded me. I went on with the show. Got a little operatic combination to come from the north of England to delight the music-lovers of the narrow valley during a short season. No chorus, just the principals and an orchestra of four competent players. In our little hall they were Covent Garden.

Then, swollen with success, I went all out to get Macdona's Shavian Players into the narrow valley. To achieve this I had to agree to a guarantee against loss for four performances, my own selection, which were "Man and Superman"; "Pygmalion"; "Mrs. Warren's Profession" and "Candida". All right, said Mr. Macdona, one of my companies will come on to you from Weston-super-Mare for the latter half of August Bank Holiday week. What?

I wrote to inform him that the valley was practically deserted

during the August Bank Holiday week, when everybody who could afford to go went down to the sea at Porthcawl. "That's all I can offer you," was his reply. "All right, let 'em come," I said. Booking offices were opened at the two townships of Blaengarw and Pontycymmer; and I advertised a series of three free lecture recitals on "Shaw, the Man and his Work", in the hope of getting people to stay home during August Bank Holiday week to patronize our Shavian shows. Booking was slow for the evening performances; there were no bookings at all for the Saturday matinée—yes, there was one seat I had booked for Laura, who now went everywhere that I did. In desperation I appealed to two amateur actresses to play the big scene from "Mrs. Warren's Profession" after one of my talks. They did, and the booking for the evening performances improved. But that Saturday matinée. My last booking effort was a lecture-recital, free of charge, of "THE SCENE IN HELL", from Shaw's masterpiece, "Man and Superman". The word *HELL* I had printed in big red lettering, and a crowd came to hear me. Another fillip for the booking for evening performances. Thirty-three shillings was all the bookings for the Saturday matinée of "Candida" that I could show to Mr. Rayner, the general manager, when he came into the narrow valley two days in advance of the company.

"It's not the booking that's worrying me at the moment," he said, "but this stage. How I'm to get that garden scene for 'Mrs. Warren's Profession' fixed on this stage . . ."

"Do you think you'll be able to play the Scene in Hell from 'Man and Superman'?" I asked him.

"It'll be hell getting any scene set on this stage," he said.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Dunstan's stage manager made it look like Rome for 'Julius Caesar', and you know the crowd scene in that? You know, when Anthony——"

"Yes, I know," he sighed. "Got any wood wings?"

I waved my hand. "You can see what we've got."

"Well, of all the—I must go and have a drink. It's seldom I do drink—come along."

Whilst we were having the drink, I again asked if it were possible for us to have "Man and Superman" in its entirety.

"No," he said. "Might have been able to do it if Esme Percy were with us, but Neil Porter's never done the whole thing."

"It would buck the booking up," I said; then went on to tell him what I had had to do to get the bookings we had—"You haven't done so bad," he said.—"Then how about that

Scene in Hell," I said.—"No doubt Porter could learn it—You see, it was the subject of one of my lecture recitals, and it was after that we did most booking."

The man sighed and said: "If you've read the play you'll know that there is more than one character in that scene. So don't keep on asking—"

"All right," I said. "All the same, I hope you come in the winter when next you come, and then perhaps you'll give us the Hell Scene as well."

However, those who witnessed the performances of those most talented Macdona Players were quite satisfied without the Hell Scene. What players they were! There was Rayner's wife, and his two sons; Florence Jackson; Charles Sewell; Neil Porter; Ivan Brandt and others. At the end of the first performance I had a little girl ready to present a bouquet of flowers to the leading lady, Miss Florence Jackson—something to make the people talk, and get them to book seats. That was the first time a bouquet of flowers had been presented to anyone in that mining village, so no wonder it made them talk.

The Saturday matinée was our great anxiety, for what with the heat-wave, and the buses and trains offering dirt-cheap returns to the sea at Porthcawl and back, it was impossible to get anything like an audience. Only four pounds six shillings *gross* in the house for "Candida". Mr. Rayner and I stood at the entrance looking down a sunny and almost deserted street. "There's another one coming," I said as Will Eynon, one of our best patrons, came hurrying along the street. "This chap's one of the valley's finest amateur actors, Mr. Rayner. Comes to all our shows."

"To have to play to such a house," he sighed.

I sighed in sympathy. "Tell you what, Mr. Rayner, we'll give the few that have come their money back, and I'll take the players for a blow, some fresh air they'll get up the top of the Carn Mountain. You can see the Bristol Channel from the top of the Carn Mountain on a clear day like to-day."

"I don't want to see the Bristol Channel," he said, kneading his chin. "If we return the money, and there's no show, it'll be crying stinking fish for to-night's house. Let's get on with it." He went back-stage, and as soon as he did the chap we kept at the end of the rope pulled up the drop-curtain, which had a scaffold pole along the bottom. On with the show. Still, we had a packed house for "Mrs. Warren's Profession" that evening.

Between the visits of professional companies I sandwiched the



productions of the valley's two amateur companies of players in which I and the three eldest of my children took part. And Laura, now as well as ever again since she had had her new teeth, came to see everything. Talk about being happy. . . . And so into 1926, the year of the general strike, the year of the longest of all mining stoppages, the year which—well, a disastrous year for all.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MINERS LET DOWN

I TRIED my hand at writing a play for one of the amateur companies I and the children were playing about with in the evenings, a one-acter, that's all. But they didn't like my "Dad's Double", so I sent it north to Manchester to a one-act play competition, and it was one of the three selected for production. It was on for a week, but I was not able to go and see it performed owing to the general strike and what followed. Anyway, I had three guineas and some little royalty money, and the *Manchester Guardian* gave me fifteen lines of qualified praise.

With the three guineas I received for the play I bought a navy-blue costume at a sale for Laura. Just went in to the shop, picked out an assistant about Laura's size, and asked her to try on the costume which was displayed in one of the windows. She did, and I took it home to Laura, and it fitted her down to the ground. Talk about being pleased! . . . But she was no more pleased than I was to think that the first bit of money earned by writing made her happy, and look well into the bargain.

Dunstan came to us for our second Shakespearian Festival early in 1926. What a week we had. All bookable seats booked up for every performance; and what a rush there was for the limited number of unreserved seats at a shilling, which were under the gallery in what we called "the chicken-run". We had as many as six buses waiting to convey our patrons down the valley to their homes after the performances; and those buses lined up outside our hall made our little township at the foot of the high mountain look like London.

That was the one bright spot in what turned out to be the blackest year of our lives. The mine-owners were insisting on a reduction of wages, and a lengthening of the working-day. The Government was declaring that the subsidy granted to avoid a stoppage in 1925 would not under any circumstances

be continued ; and our leaders were saying : " Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day." So there we were.

May 3rd, 1926, a lovely day for our May Day Demonstration, which was to be addressed by the member for the division, the Rt. Hon. Vernon Hartshorn, M.P., Ex-Postmaster-General, for whom a huge crowd waited. But he was held up in London where a national miners' conference was rejoicing in the fact that the T.U.C. had called the General Strike. So there were no trains—no anything. And there were we, right up at the dead-end of the narrow valley, not knowing what to do, what was being done—but we had to do something. We local leaders stood looking at each other, and a huge crowd looking at us. " Then who's going to do the talking ? " said Jack Price.

" Jack, of course," said Charles Gunter, pointing to me.

" Why, of course ? " I asked. " Suppose one of you others do the talking for a change. This is not only the annual May Day meeting, but also the beginning of I don't know what ? "

" Got the wind up ? " sneered Illtyd Deere.

" Suppose I have, and you do the talking."

" I would if I could——"

" Come on, Jack," said Gunter, " the crowd's getting restive."

So I talked instead of the advertised Ex-Postmaster-General, talked more soberly than ever before, for I was talking to men whom I felt would have to go through a lot before they did another day's work. For about an hour I talked.

Nine days I think the General Strike lasted before it was called off, and the miners were left to either fight on alone, or return to work whilst a settlement was being negotiated along the lines of the Memorandum submitted as a basis for negotiation by the level-headed Sir Herbert Samuel. But our leaders said : " Fight on."

" Now we're properly in the cart," said I to Charles Gunter, who was chairman of the Joint Committees, and who with me was most responsible for the guidance of the thousands of miners of that narrow valley.—" Yes, looks like it," he said.—" The men," I said, " drew their week in hand last Friday, and that's the last money they'll draw until they've been at work a fortnight again. And they don't look like being back in work much this side of Christmas. So I take it that we local leaders will go through the stoppage, let it be long or short, on the same footing as the men. Live on whatever strike-pay there'll be, and on relief on loan from the guardians. For the



money we've got in lodge funds will have to be pooled now to start the feeding-centres for the kids."

"Yes, you're right," said Charles Gunter. "Though, as a member of the Bridgend and Cowbridge Board of Guardians I can't apply for relief on loan for my family. Still, we'll manage somehow."

"Somehow", it was, for a weekly note for twenty-six shillingworth of food was what I got from the relieving-officer to keep my family through that stoppage. "£35 18s. 6d. advanced by way of Relief on loan by the said Union", was what I had to sign for in all.

Yet whilst getting up to my neck in debt, I worked harder than ever before. Running about here, there and everywhere, like a non-stop gramophone. In the valley seeing to feeding-centres and other matters, and out of the valley to meetings and conferences. For I was District Chairman; conference delegate; Trade Union Congress delegate, and other things as well. As an out-door speaker I was in great demand in districts where "the ranks were breaking", and miners were drifting back to work. "Blacklegs", "scabs", "rats", were a few of the epithets applied to them. So speakers were required to "stiffen" the men's resistance, to inspire them to go on half-starving themselves and their families.

In response to S O S's I went to several districts to shout "stand firm, lads", but my heart wasn't in my words. Yet I hadn't the courage then to say what I really thought, for it's far from easy to say what one really thinks during such a struggle. Firstly, there were upwards of a million men smarting under what they had been made to believe was an act of betrayal by the General Council of the Trade Union Congress in calling off the General Strike. Secondly, our own national leaders, under communist influence and with the promise of the financial assistance of "our Russian comrades", lacked the courage to admit that our lone fight was hopeless. "Stick it, lads. Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day."

"Men returning to work in the Forest of Dean coalfield. Off you go, Jack." From the Forest of Dean to Notts, Derbyshire, Staffs and Warwickshire. Then back into South Wales, the last coalfield to weaken. It was no fun speaking at those meetings. With the men in an ugly temper, and the meetings ringed by police, one's words had to be carefully chosen. And it wasn't a case of two or three gathered together, but thousands of angry and hungry men. One gathering at which I spoke with A. J. Cook was upwards of forty thousand strong. At

Hayes Heath, Cannock Chase, that was, and there was a strong force of police in attendance. It was there I met John Strachey for the first time. He was then editing *The Miner*, and was accompanying Cook to some of his meetings; so were other pressmen, for Cook was "news" in those days. So Strachey, serving his political apprenticeship, was with Cook, who was General Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

He had succeeded Frank Hodges, who, poor chap, was now only able to speak as Secretary of the Miners' International, of which the British miners were the mainstay. This job was the bone thrown to Frank after he had lost his seat in Parliament, and his Civil Lordship of the Admiralty, before he had held them a year. Now the communist element of the Miners' Federation were demanding his removal from this last and least of his jobs for what he had said in the course of his address before the Royal Society of Arts. "A stab in the back", the communists said he had given us. What he had rightly said was that: "The refusal of the miners' leaders to accept the report—of the Samuel Commission—and all that it implied, will be recorded as the greatest error in Trade Union history." For that his "instant dismissal" from the secretaryship of the Miners' International was being clamoured for by the communist section of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

Up and down the country I went shouting, "Stick it, lads", like a parrot. There were scores of Labour M.P.'s doing the same thing, and we met here and there. From South Derbyshire I went by request into the Leicestershire coalfield, the miners' agent of which had some time before gone off to Russia with what was called "a Mission", which was nothing more than a mooching expedition to get more Russian financial support for our strike funds. Whilst he was away, the men of his district being left without a shepherd strayed back to work in the pits, and their example was affecting the adjoining coalfields of South Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. So every available speaker was rushed there to stop the rot, which had gone too far to be stopped. With Coalville as our base, we went out to try and stiffen the men's resistance day after day, night after night for a fortnight. I had to leave there to attend the Trade Union Congress at Bournemouth, to which I travelled with Herbert Buck, the miners' agent for the South Derbyshire coalfield. "We're whacked, Herb," said I to him. We were seated in opposite corners of a compartment of the Bournemouth train.

"Five months," said I, "and still no signs of a settlement. Herb, once I used to do a bit of boxing. Yes, I've seen many a fight, but what I disliked about the game was the way they used to send men out round after round to be punished when they hadn't an earthly chance of winning. You know the game, the seconds receiving their man in a state of collapse, working on him for a minute, then easing him up to his feet and pushing him forward to get some more of what he's already had plenty. More punishment. Something like that is what we're doing, Herb, as we go around shouting, 'Stick it, lads.' Don't you think so?"

"Maybe," he murmured non-committally.

"Yet we go on doing it. Why? Loyalty? But to what? To an empty bloody slogan, that's what, Herb."

"Still, you must admit that it would be for their good if we could keep them solid until our leaders negotiate a national settlement."

"National or district settlements—Herb, I've been in every stoppage since '98—let's see. Yes, that's twenty-eight years. Wages, hours, conditions, allowances, victimization, non-unionist—all sorts of disputes, I've been through. At last I've arrived at the conclusion that we could have had all we ever have had, if not more, without a day's stoppage. Some day I may have the courage to get up in one of our conferences and say so."

"Then your name would be mud."

"Don't I know it. So I go on shouting, 'Stick it, lads.' For who?—for what? For the Communist Party and its Minority movement? or for the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress?"

Herbert Buck merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Trade Union Congress," I continued. "Here's you and me going to it as two mining delegates, and we know very well what's going to happen. An unholy row between the mining delegation and the General Council of the T.U.C. Us chaps shouting all sorts of names at the platform; calling Jimmy Thomas this, and another that. Yes, there's going to be ructions, but that's not going to help our men, women and children in the coalfields."

And there was ructions at that Congress, where it was a case of "Mining delegation versus the General Council of the T.U.C." The Congress had a new secretary, Walter Citrine succeeding the deceased Fred Bramley. Near Mr. Citrine on the platform the new Editor of the *Daily Herald* sat, waiting to



be introduced to Congress. It was William Mellor, whom I had last met when we were both helping to form the Communist Party of Great Britain at Manchester. Evidently we were both growing wiser. Well, let's hope they treat him better than they did Hamilton Fyfe, who had to bow to the storm of protest one of his straight-from-the-shoulder leading articles gave rise to. He resigned ; and here is William Mellor waiting to take charge with the approval of Congress.

Quietly, Mr. Clynes passes on his way to his place in the midst of the delegates of his trade union. Mr. Cramp shepherds the railwaymen's delegation into their places. Miss Bondfield, with a brief-case in her hand, a tight smile on her face, looks about. Ah, a couple more of the old Manchester m    . Jack Tanner, radiating left-wing bonhomie, looks down on little Ellen Wilkinson. George Hicks is listening to the latest gags of my namesake, the Irish Jack Jones who is member for Silverton. Ben Tillett and—yes, we're all here, all looking merry and bright.

With the exception of the strong mining delegation, which sits apart, like the hostile force it is. Around Herbert Smith, wearing his little old cloth cap, we sit like the martyrs we think we are. "We, whom you have betrayed", etc., is what our resentful glances conveyed. We sit more or less silent whilst the rest of Congress are greeting each other and laughing. Arthur Pugh, chairman of this year's congress, introduces the Mayor of Bournemouth, who hopes we will have a most enjoyable week. We of the mining delegation sniff at this. There are fraternal delegates from America ; and all the industrial correspondents of the world's Press are present in holiday attire. J. F. Horrabin is making rapid sketches of some of the personalities present.

A very long telegram signed by Tomskey, General Secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions, is read. Tomskey had in person been received with acclamation at the Hull Trade Union Congress not so long before, but this telegram to this year's Congress is by no means well received. For in it he accuses the General Council of having betrayed the miners, of having let them down, and I don't know what altogether. "Ill-instructed and presumptuous criticism," said the General Council.—"Half-a-mo," shouted the left-wing of Congress rising to support the absent Tomskey. But Arthur Pugh, with the assistance of burly Ernest Bevin, rode that storm. But not the next.

He called upon John Bromley to speak, did Arthur Pugh ;

and the mining delegation rose like one man and shouted that Bromley should not speak on any question relating to our dispute. "He's said too bloody much already," shouted a Durham delegate. The storm raged, and Pugh from the platform named McGurk, a Lancashire mining M.P. ; and also Edward Hough, vice-President of the Yorkshire Miners' Federation, both of whom had to leave. "You can chuck us all out, and even then he shan't speak," said the delegate from Durham. Ernest Bevin whispered in Pugh's ear. Pugh then said that the business of Congress was suspended until . . . The rest of what he said was lost in the storm. Twice this happened, and each time it was pandemonium. But the General Council won in the end, and John Bromley addressed Congress, many of the mining delegates sitting with their backs to him whilst he did so.

The atmosphere throughout the week was what I believe is called "electric". Mac came down to say a word in Congress, and to address a crowd jammed into the Drill Hall on "The Mining Dispute". He talked erroneously about "district" and "national" agreements—which didn't much matter, for it was little that that Bournemouth audience knew about matters affecting only miners. But I couldn't stay there listening to a man talking through the back of his neck, so I decided to leave to go and listen to Dan Godfrey's band. But when I got outside it was to find A. J. Cook addressing a crowd which blocked two streets, a crowd of at least three thousand. And he was slamming Mac and the General Council for all he was worth. Within a stone's throw of where Mac was speaking inside the Drill Hall. Such is unity, I thought.

Anyway, my road being blocked, I didn't hear Dan Godfrey's band that night, but the next night I heard it play at the Mayor's farewell reception to delegates to Congress. This was on the Friday evening, after the so-called "Parliament of Labour" had been at sixes and sevens for the best part of five days. Now we were resting after our labour. Arthur Pugh, most able chairman that year, looked sleek and satisfied in full evening dress, as several of our officers and delegates were. Old Ben Tillett was dancing like a good 'un to the music of Dan Godfrey's band. There was a "come-and-get-it" buffet where one could get anything within reason to eat and drink. There were cigars and cigarettes to smoke ; and the music was divine, and why shouldn't a man be happy once in a while ?

But I was as miserable as sin for some unknown reason. Out I went to look at the sea—anything, anywhere away from there. It was about the time o' night when the chaps in the feeding-centres throughout the coalfield would be preparing things for the morrow. It was—what was it we gave them for dinner on Saturdays? Roast? Well, whatever it is, the chaps are making preparations now in places where the band was not playing. A million of 'em and their dependents in the blacklands of Britain; and here we were, after a week's squabbling, smoking and dancing and . . .

"Are we educated?" I asked the man in the moon. "Must we for ever be squabbling and fighting each other?" The man in the moon, after a contemptuous look down at me, had himself conveyed behind a cloud. Evidently he was sick of the sight of people who by 1926 hadn't learnt the way to live at peace one with the other.

. . . . .

At the end of the longest mining stoppage in British industrial history, the miners returned to work, district by district, and in driblets, on worse terms than those obtainable without a day's stoppage. It was Christmas Eve, 1926, and I was wishing chaps who had not yet got back to work a happy Christmas. Not a penny in wages from the 1st of May to Christmas, by which time they were all, as I was, up to their necks in debt to the board of Guardians, the co-op, rentman, and others. The stoppage of 1921 had "scrapped" the likes of my dad, the sixty-and-over men; this later and much longer stoppage was to "scrap" scores of thousands of miners of fifty-and-over. Many of the pits which restarted after the stoppage only worked part-time before closing down again for good. Districts which had caved in, or had been flooded, never were reopened.

The financial help received from "our Russian comrades" had increased our staying power to bring about this state of affairs. Perhaps not altogether our fault, this depression and dereliction. The mine-owners and the Government were also to blame, but I was not looking at things from either the Government or mine-owners' angles. During the far from merry Christmas-time of 1926 I was forced to try and think things out, forced by the fact that I was nearly a hundred pounds in debt as the result of the stoppage. Still, I was drawing wages once again, which was more than hundreds in the narrow valley were doing.



Early in 1927 Joe Davies, Secretary of the Swansea Labour Party, asked me to again deliver my lecture-recital on Shaw's "Saint Joan". I wrote back to say that I would speak on "The Lessons of 1926". He was agreeable, though I doubt whether he realized what I would say under that head. What didn't I say! The Elysium, which is the property of the trades unionists of Swansea, was comfortably filled when I rose to startle them by saying that I thought the General Council were quite right in calling the General Strike off when they did, the mistake was the calling of it in the first place. After nearly thirty years of industrial warfare I had made up my mind never to take part in any further dispute—and a lot more I said before sitting down to allow the chairman to get up to invite questions, which came from all parts of the hall. I didn't care, for at last I had had my bang out, as we say in Wales, had spoken my mind, and was ready to put up with the consequences.

Both the South Wales daily papers carried in the following day's issue such parts of my speech as the editors liked. The industrial news-sheet of the Communist Party, *The Worker*, carried the parts of my speech which it disliked under the heading of: "RENEGADE'S SONG". A few quotations reveals its quality. "The policy of Jones is the policy of Baldwin. It is the gospel of class co-operation and industrial peace preached in another form." That I was—and still am prepared to accept. The article concluded with: "The only conclusion one can arrive at after listening to this bourgeois hack, is that the time has come for the miners to remove him from his office."

Another storm in our narrow valley, where the communists distributed a couple of thousand copies of the issue of *The Worker* containing a garbled version of my Swansea speech, and the editor's unfriendly comments. But I was busy preparing for my third—and last—Shakespearian Festival. Edward Dunstan, in view of the impoverishment of the people of the narrow valley by the previous year's stoppage, was prepared to cancel the booking. But I begged him to come, feeling that we needed what he and his players could provide more than ever before. So he came, and whilst he was with us the Cwm explosion killed 52 miners. A few days later I received a cheque for seven guineas for the explosion fund from Sean O'Casey. The reason he sent it to me instead of sending it direct was because he had my address from the time I had written to ask him to deliver an address on Irish Drama

during the Educational Campaign organized by me. I sent his cheque on to the fund.

Soon after I was requested to speak through the Market Bosworth By-Election Campaign. Being well known throughout the mining part of the division, where I had delivered scores of "stick it, lads", speeches during the previous year's mining stoppage, it was thought that I would be worth at least a thousand votes to the Labour candidate. During the fortnight the campaign lasted I spoke at different places with different speakers. About a half-hundred of the Labour movement's leading speakers I renewed acquaintance with. Quite a mixed lot they were. Elderly men including Arthur Henderson and F. O. Roberts—who carried his fiddle around with him to meetings—J. H. Thomas, Commander Kenworthy, Maxton, the Mosleys, Oliver Baldwin and many others of "our side".

Lloyd George came up to speak at Coalville for the Liberal candidate, so I left Oliver Baldwin to carry on from the lorry in front of the Labour Exchange whilst I had an hour off to listen to my white-haired, but very much alive countryman. He addressed a huge crowd from the balcony of the Liberal Club. What a speech! It won the seat, did that speech. Yes, the Ll. G. Liberal candidate got in with a majority of two hundred and odd votes.

In the train on the way home again I could not but think of that speech I had heard Ll. G. deliver at Coalville, and the idea of a sort of "popular front" began to form in my mind. There were many things in the Liberal "Coal and Power" policy which I knew would benefit the miners, particularly the nationalization of the mineral royalties. Then why couldn't the Labour and Liberal parties, and the younger and more progressive Conservatives, get together and achieve what was possible? Why should we remain futile fragments crying for the moon? Something like that was what I thought about when on the train—which is the place where most politicians do their thinking, I believe.

Before I had been a week back in the narrow valley I decided to suggest this "popular front" or whatever you like to call it. It was at the district meeting, which was held once a month at Bridgend, where delegates from all over the district met to pay in their Lodge contributions, and to discuss matters. The reports were depressing. Hundreds of men still who had not restarted after the long stoppage of the previous year; and "non-unionism" was becoming alarming. "Time we had

another back-to-the-union campaign," said a delegate from the Kenfig.

"Time enough to talk about a back-to-the-union campaign when we've succeeded in getting our chaps their work back," I said. Then I went on to suggest what for want of a better name I will call a "popular front".

"Instead of disastrous strikes and lock-outs such as we went through last year, why can't we work with the Liberals in Parliament to get some of the things we want, and which are to be also found in the Liberal Coal and Power policy."

"Work with Lloyd George," cried one. "Have you forgotten how he betrayed us over the Sankey Commission's Report? Why, I wouldn't trust such a diddler any further——"

"Mr. Chairman, that Sankey's Report business has been flogged to death to suit our own book. Anyway, if you think Lloyd George is not to be trusted now over this Coal and Power business, then why don't we call his bluff? Accept his offer of help——"

The miners' agent rose to say that he hoped, for the sake of the movement—"and for Mr. Jones's sake"—that this suggestion to work with the Liberal Party would not be heard outside that room. It was, he said, common knowledge by now, that the Liberals had combined with the Tories to overthrow the first Labour Government. In any case, he would point out that Mr. Jones was entirely out of order. As a Federation we are affiliated to the Labour Party, and are bound by its decisions——

"Gagged, you mean."

"I mean what I say, Mr. Jones. What you suggest is nothing short of—well, is something which you are not at liberty to advocate within this Federation."

"Then I'll advocate it outside the Federation."

"Get those children to bed," I said to Laura as soon as I reached home that night. "I've got some writing to do."

When they were all upstairs and in bed out of my way, I sat down to write my first article for the Press, which was finished about six o'clock next morning. "The Need for A Lib.-Lab. Coalition." Three drafts were scrapped, the fourth was satisfactory, I thought, after reading it aloud about a half-dozen times. I addressed it to "The Editor, 'South Wales Daily News', St. Mary Street, Cardiff", and posted it there and then before my mind had time to change. As Laura was getting up to get Glynne off to work, I was undressing to get a couple of hours' sleep before going to my office at Blaengarw.



"Where have you been all night?" she said.

"Writing. Call me after the children are gone to school."

"I want you to talk to Clifford," she said. "He won't get up to look for a job."

"Not much good him look in this valley."

"Can't you speak to the manager to get him something to do on top of the pit?"

"There are hundreds of men I can't get the management to give jobs to. Anyway, I want some sleep."

"You could have had your sleep the same time as other people."

"Shut up." Clifford was a problem, all the same. Failed his "matric", or whatever they call it. Now knocking about, almost as big as me, with nothing to do. Young Lawrence passed his entrance exam for the secondary school as Clifford left it. Would Lawrence fail his final exam when his time came? Clifford had started smoking, Laura was saying. "Right in front of my eyes." Half-asleep by now, thinking what a problem children are when they grow up in such places as our narrow valley, where there are no opportunities for them to . . .

Next day I realized the power of the printed word, for the narrow valley was placarded from top to bottom with "Garw Valley Socialist's Daring Article." This must have been the swan-song of the *South Wales Daily News*, which soon after the publication of this and subsequent articles of mine died in a merger. Anyway, it "splashed" me this day, yes, right from the placard to the editorial. "A Welsh socialist, greatly daring . . ." was how the leading article started off.

For the first time I had something worthy of being called a "public". People throughout Wales, and the Welsh people resident in London who always took the *South Wales Daily News*, were asking: "Who is this Jack Jones? Never heard of him." But now, with my own fifteen hundred words staring 'em in the face on the one page, and the leader-writer's article about me on the opposite page, they must have felt that I was someone of importance.

In the narrow valley it was a first-class sensation. The Liberals came out of their shells to say how much they appreciated what I had written; and the communists, I.L.P.'ers and members of the local Labour Party came together for the first time to deal with me firmly. A special meeting is demanded, and convened, and I am called upon by the chairman to explain—"if you can". The hall is crowded and there are

present a fair number of Liberals who for years have not attended Lodge meetings. Their murmured "hear, hear" as I explain infuriates the opposition.

After my explanation a gagging resolution is moved and declared carried. In future I must not write anything for the "boss-press". As a full-time official of an organization affiliated to the Labour Party I was bound by—

I interrupted to say that I had heard that before, and that in the future I intended speaking and writing as I pleased.

"Not as secretary-representative of this bloody Lodge, you won't," shouted someone, and the applause was terrific.

Then I sang my swan-song. "That doesn't put the wind up me, either. About five years ago, when I started thinking for myself, some of you sent for J. T. Murphy to squash me, but he failed. Since then I've tried to serve the people of this valley as best I could. Now I find that there's less room for a man with a mind of his own in the Labour Party than there was in the Communist Party. So I'm getting out. Twelve pounds I borrowed to shift my home and family into this valley ; I shall be leaving the valley owing a lot more than that. Here's this one item alone, thirty-five pounds eighteen shillings and sixpence to the Board of Guardians—that's what me and my family went through last year's stoppage on. Ten bob a day and percentage I could have gone on drawing. I'm glad I didn't, for now I owe you nothing. So I can say what I like, write what I like, and do what I like."

On the 22nd of October, after my books had been audited and found correct, I handed over to my communist successor. Unemployed.

"Now what'll we do?" said Laura.

## CHAPTER XXII

### “WHAT ARE YOU NOW THEN, JOHN?”

THAT was what our mam asked me when I went across to Merthyr to address a Liberal meeting. “What are you now then, John?” Dad up and said: “Liberal, woman—didn’t he say in the letter I read for you?”—“Did he? I forget. Come to your food, John.”

Yes, a Liberal, or, as brother Dick said: “Shouting the odds for the Liberal Party.” My first and subsequent unsolicited and unpaid articles had been read by people high up in the political world. Mr. MacDonald read them and denounced me as “a wobbler-r-r, my friends. And a wobbler-r-r’s no good to any par-rty.” Mr. A. J. Cook and a number of mining M.P.’s helped to make “news” of me and my writings by referring to me and them from platforms and in the Labour press. But, they pointed out, although he has taken advantage of the space the boss-press is always prepared to allow such as he, he takes care not to appear in person in our mining valleys to talk as he writes.

So I went to speak at a public meeting in one of the “red” townships of the Rhondda Valley, on the subject of “Coal and Power”, the Liberal policy for the mining industry. Oh, a hot time we had for about a half an hour. The “Pictorium” was the name of the cinema which had been bought by the local Liberals for the evening of my appearance at Pentre in the then so “red” Rhondda Valley. “Judas!” shouted the communists. Each time the chairman rose to introduce me the communist male voice party at the back began singing “The Red Flag”. The Liberals present murmured: “Give the man fair play.” For quite half an hour I sat waiting in full view of the audience for a chance to speak. At last, just when the communist male voice party at the back reached the end of the refrain of “The Red Flag”, I jumped up and roared: “They’re afraid to let me speak, Mr. Chairman. They’ve got the wind-up. Here, I’ll make a bargain with you.



For as much of your time as I take, you can, for the same length of time, get at me a mile a minute with questions or criticism of my speech." They let me speak.

Soon after that "try-out" against the toughest opposition to be found outside Russia, I was having a cup of tea with Lloyd George, whose speaking staff I was invited to join.

We sat in an upper chamber of his headquarters in Old Queen Street, London, which at that time was a very busy place. The greatest political "come-back" of all time was being planned, and I was invited to take part in it. Lloyd George, looking as fit as a fiddle, sat questioning me; and in a couple of minutes had drained me of all I could supply in the way of information. Before they led me out he said that he would soon come to Cardiff to address with me a conference of mining delegates on the Liberal Coal and Power policy, which he and I would present as "The Miners' Charter". He couldn't give me much time that day, for there were a number of "experts" to be interviewed. Old Queen Street was stinking with experts in one thing and another; and the departmentalization was simply wonderful, so wonderful that I was glad to get out of the place to face up to crowds again.

So into action I went as a member of the world's greatest professional team of political speakers. Ernie Brown, Ernie Young and Eddie Baker and those other unbeatable speakers, who in mass attacks on the ghastly indifference of the post-war electorate, and during loud-speaker-van campaigns, proclaimed the coming to power of the "New Liberalism".

The other members of the team were what are called "life-long Liberals"; I was what is called "a notable convert". The others had, it is true, at one time been divided into "Asquithians" and "Georgians", but Liberals for all that. Nobody could shout "Judas" at a man of them, now that they were united for the great Lloyd George Liberal Come-Back. But as for me . . . There were plenty of kicks waiting me in places where chairmen introduced me as one who had at long last "seen the light". To the toughest places I was taken to speak on "Why I left the Labour Party"; or "Why I joined the Liberal Party". And the chairmen . . . "I am now going to call upon one who has seen the error of his ways"; or "One who has returned to the fold; to the political faith of his fathers." Such chairmen were nuisances when there was an ironical and hostile minority at the meeting—chairmen are unnecessary to speakers able to speak for themselves—and I could at least do that.

Not that I minded going to the "tough spots", the "Labour strongholds", as the mining divisions were regarded. That's where I wanted to work, I told Lloyd George. "For I don't care for tea-party meetings, sir."—"Neither do I," said Lloyd George.

In December of 1927 he came down to Cardiff to talk with me to mining delegates from all parts of the South Wales and Monmouthshire coalfield. As I was about to enter the Cory Hall with Lloyd George and Megan a man with a camera said: "One moment, please." We turned about. CLICK. "Thank you," said the man; and in the next week's issue of *The Tatler* there was I looking Mephistophelean on the front page. You see, I was standing on the step above and behind Ll. G. and Miss Megan. When I went to speak some time later at Tylorstown, where the great little Jimmy Wilde lived when he was working in the pit, I was confronted with the front-page photo. A communist in the audience held it aloft and shouted: "Here he is, comrades, here the traitor is. On the front page of the bloody *Tatler*, the boss-class picture-paper. Easy to see where he's going, comrades."

That was later. At the conference before which I was "snapped" with Ll. G. and Miss Megan I spoke for about forty minutes before making way for Ll. G. We were both on form that day; and we had a very good press both in the Sunday papers and the daily papers on the Monday.

That was the last I saw of Ll. G. that year, but we met early the next year in West Lothian, where a candidate who was a Lloyd George Liberal was fighting Shinwell, the Labour candidate, and a Conservative candidate. Our candidate was an able London-Scottish barrister, but he was not an authority on the shale-mining industry, the depressed state of which was the main issue of that by-election. So before he was let loose on the electorate he was crammed by me and another member of the speakers' team who knew all about coal and shale mining. At his hotel in Edinburgh we crammed him, and fair play to the man, he was soon fit to be heard in public. Many a good candidate needs a little cramming, and is none the worse after it. After the intensive cramming our candidate at that by-election talked like a book, but question-time he found rather trying.

Still, we had a man in our speakers' team who was well able to look after our candidate during those trying periods. The encyclopædic Ernest Brown was the most informative noise in

British politics ; and what he didn't know could safely be described as unknown and unknowable. A man monstrously efficient. His cold-steel voice stunned hostile audiences into submission. Facts, facts, facts ; dates, dates, dates, irrefutable and undeniable. Those who had come to heckle sat silent, unable to get a word in edgeways. On and on—but never up and up. No note of appeal—no sign of a heart. All head—and mouth. An informative noise. Yes, he certainly knew his stuff. The Green Book, the Brown Book, and an advance copy of the Liberal Yellow Book had been read by him before the rest of us had done more than turn the pages. And the publications of all other parties he had also committed to memory. Hansard's back to Gladstone had he also made profitable use of, until he was armed at all points from the neck up. I learnt much from him as we went about together—though we were not often together, for he was in the first flight of speakers.

We met at the Kingsway Hall Yellow Book conference, but not at the speakers' school which was held at Old Queen Street shortly after the conference. It was felt that all members of the speakers' team should have a final week's intensive training under Hubert Phillips—whose jokes were excellent—and Professor Ramsay Muir. All of us sat under these two Liberal Gamaliels, all with the exception of the star member of the team. He knew everything backwards and inside-out, so why bother to bring him to a speakers' school.

Basil Murray was fighting in the Marylebone by-election at the time, and after school we were instructed by Mr. Benjamin Musgrave, the meetings manager of Old Queen Street, to go and give young Basil a hand. But the Moscow Art Theatre Players were playing at the Garrick Theatre, so I went there instead. Isn't Ostrovsky's "Poverty is no Crime" a lovely thing? I didn't altogether desert Basil's cause to go to the Garrick to see those Russians act and hear them speak and sing much like we Welsh people used to. Oh, no. I several times said a few words for Basil before boarding a tram or bus for the Garrick Theatre. Funny thing, I understood everything without understanding a word in the language sense. How is that? Perhaps it was because those Russians were on that stage what my Welsh ancestors had been before the industrial revolution. Anyway, I got what they tried to convey, and enjoyed every second of their company.

When knocking about London and the provinces addressing meetings, and seeing people and things, I often thought of



Laura at home carrying on with those five handfuls, as they all were by now—no, four, not five, for Clifford, having vainly tried for a year to find work, had joined the Royal Corps of Signals. Still, the four left at home took some handling. Some day, I said to myself, I'll take Lol to London—she's never been there—and give her the time of her life.

So when my voice went after a week's street-corner work in the Rhondda Valley and my own division of Neath, the doctor said: "What an awful throat you've got." Advised me to stop speaking for at least a week. Meetings were cancelled where substitutes were not available. "Lol, we're going to London to-morrow," I croaked.

"London," she said. "Yes, London. M.E. can see to things whilst we're away."—"Of course I can," said M.E.—"But look what it'll cost," said Laura.—"We've cleared off every penny of debt, and I've got about eight pounds saved out of exes. Listen, you'll be forty-nine next birthday and—"—"No, forty-eight."—"Forty-nine, for you were born in April, 1880, and now it's August— Anyway, you've never been to London, so you're going to-morrow." She was up half the night getting ready—and she didn't sleep a wink the other half. Too excited.

We had lunch on the train—Laura had wanted to take food in paper. But I told her that I couldn't be seen eating out of a paper bag now that I was a Liberal candidate for Parliament. "Perhaps not," she said. After we had finished lunch she opened her eyes when she saw the man give me three shillings change out of a ten-shilling note—and then I gave the chap sixpence for himself.

"We shan't want many meals at that price," said Laura as we were on our way back to the compartment.

I could see then that it was not going to be easy to carry out my plan of giving Laura the time of her life, for she had for too long been forced to watch every penny.

Having stayed at the National Hotel, Russell Square, when attending miners' and Liberal conferences at the Kingsway Hall, I took Laura there in a taxi, in which she sat watching the clock in front and on the left of the driver. Half a crown I gave the man before going in to book a room for a few nights. "How much?" said Laura, when we were alone in our room.—"What do you mean?"—"How much do they charge for staying here?"—"Never you mind."—"Let me see that card the young woman gave you."—"Will you—"—"Let me see it." I gave it her.—"Seventeen shillings—how long's

that for?"—"Bed to-night and breakfast in the morning."—"No, never!"

"Now, look here, Lol, if it was buns and penny sticks of rock you thought we came up here for, then you're wrong. This is London, girl. So shut up, and leave me do the worrying for a change."

With a resigned look on her face she went to swill her face and hands, then we went out. As we were leaving the hotel she whispered: "No more taxis, remember." So we went by bus to Selfridge's, from the roof of which Laura had the sight of her life for nothing. Then, floor by floor, we worked our way down to street-level.

"We'll come back here to buy a few little things for the children," she said. "And I could do with a hat."—"Then you shall have one." We walked along Oxford Street; then down through Regent Street, where some of the shops made Laura open her eyes. We had tea in the Strand Corner House, then we went to the Drury Lane Theatre to book seats for "Show Boat". "Nothing under seven-and-six," said the man in the booking-office. Laura gasped and said: "Come—come away, Jack."—"Two, please," I said to the man, pushing a pound-note towards him. I thought Laura was going to snatch at the pound-note, but she didn't. Walked away, and me following her with the two tickets in my hand.

"Fifteen shillings for two of us—never," she was muttering as she walked blindly ahead of me on the pavement—"Lol——"—"Take 'em back to the man—if you won't, then I will. I could never sit at my ease in any place with the taste of so much money in my mouth."

We were somewhere near Covent Garden before she gave in. I had explained to her the difference between what she was that night to see and the shows of the narrow valley. "But fifteen shillings for two of us," she interjected, time after time. I was patient, for I knew that the hand I was holding had hundreds of times hammered studs into the children's boots to make them last until we could afford to send them to be properly repaired, or buy a new pair. All sorts of jobs she had had to do to save shillings and pence, so I could understand how shocking to her was the thought of spending fifteen shillings on a couple of theatre seats. At last she smiled.

"All right then. I don't suppose I shall ever see London again, so it's just as well to make the most of it."

"Of course it is. We'll go back to that place to have

another cup of tea and sit listening to that band playing. Better than walking about, don't you think?"

"I'd rather go and sit somewhere by the River Thames. Is it far away?"

"No, no distance. Come on, dear." We sat, and walked along the Embankment until it was time to go to the theatre. "Show Boat"—Laura will never forget it. Neither will I, for the reason that she was there with me. On towards midnight we were walking hand-in-hand along Kingsway towards Southampton Row. "I'm not sorry we went, after all," she said. "It was lovely. It's a long time since I was out as late as this, Jack."—"How long?"—"I can't remember being out as late as this before."

My heart was full, too full for words, but it doesn't take much to fill my heart. A woman within a year of fifty, whose hand I was holding, and who was looking so lovely to me at midnight in the city she was visiting for the first time. I squeezed her hand.

For as good as three days and two nights we had an unforgettable time. We even saw the King—who raised his hat to Laura, and to her alone. We had seen the changing of the guard, and the crowd had melted. We had stepped across into the Park to rest awhile, for Laura was just a little tired. She sat facing the Palace; I was sat with my back to it. "Jack, look," she cried. I turned to find her on her knees, pointing at a car in which the King was sitting.

"Don't point, girl." The King noticed, smiled, raised his hat, all in less time than it takes to tell, and he was gone. Laura knelt watching the motor-car until it was out of sight. Then she sank back on her heels and murmured: "He—he raised his hat to me." Her eyes were shining; and I was ever so glad for her sake that what she had wanted more than anything else had happened. "He raised his hat to me."

That afternoon I took her to the Coliseum; in the night to His Majesty's Theatre. Four shillings apiece we paid to stand whilst three ballets were performed by the Russian Ballet, I believe. Sir Thomas Beecham came about half-time to take over from the other conductor, and left again after he had conducted "The Gods go a-Begging". Laura didn't think a lot of it. Of all she saw in London it was the sight she had of the King, and an afternoon spent at the Zoo, that she still remembers.

Among the letters waiting me at home was one from the Secretary of the Oxford University Liberal Club, in which he



asked me to come to Oxford to speak. "Must be a mistake," said I.—"Oh, I don't know," said Laura. "You can speak well enough for Oxford when you've a mind to try."—"But these are chaps in college, girl."

Must be a mistake, it was the other Jack Jones, the M.P., they wanted, no doubt. It wouldn't be the first time I had been written to by people who took me for him. At the Forest of Dean I was speaking once, and two pressmen hired a car to run out from Gloucester to report him, only to find it was me. "Why," cried one of them, evidently at a loss how to account for the hiring of the car, and feeling mad, "why didn't you get them to put 'not the M.P.' on the posters?" The Editor of *The Listener* also took me for him—or the other way round—when he put old Jack's name and photo to a Talk which I was glad to have the chance of broadcasting in the "I Remember" series. And there were other mix-ups.

So I wrote to the chap at Magdalen College to ask him if he was sure that I was the man he wanted. Me, the Welsh Jack Jones, and not the Irish Jack Jones who was in Parliament.

Yes, it was me they wanted all right, wanted me to talk on "The British Mining Problem", about which I could speak with authority. One of the Club's officials, during a vac, had heard me holding forth near the sea at Porthcawl. On top of that the Oxford Cambria Society invited me to address them also whilst I was there. From a chap in Jesus College that letter came.

So up to Oxford I went after a hectic fortnight in the mining valleys, where the communists who had just returned from a hunger march to London gave me a hot time which made Oxford appear a haven of rest when I got there. Somerset Stopford Brooke, that year's President of the Union, was my host during the three delightful days I was there. On the Wednesday evening I addressed an open meeting of undergraduates at one of the big hotels, the Randolph, I think it was. On Thursday evening I listened to a debate at the Union; on Friday evening I addressed the Cambria Society on "The Decline of Cambria".

When my host had lectures to attend, or business to attend to, I wandered about on my own. I stood gawping at the frontages of buildings which impressed me as the wise faces of old men often had. After what seemed a lifetime of strife and ranting the hallowed silences induced a feeling akin to shame. "Be still, my boy," the wind seemed to say as I stood waiting for the chap from Jesus with whom I was to dine some-

where before addressing the Cambria Society. Tried to think of the Welshmen who in centuries past had stood where I was standing. Goronwy Owen—and what about the man who wrote the Visions of the Sleeping Bard? Had he stood here? Who was I to stand up and talk about “The Decline of Cambria”? An open-mouthed, big-mouthed, street-corner politician, that’s all you are, replied the erudite wind.

“Coal and Power”, and “We can Conquer Unemployment”. Dear me. “The record of the Liberal Party—a great record, my friends. Compare it with the record of the Labour Party. Then this Government. Listen . . .”—“Be still,” said the wind. In the darkness outside Jesus College, being “debunked” by I knew not what.

Then back to South Wales, now plastered from end to end with picture-posters of our leaders. The oratorical pace was killing. As a sort of “bell-wether” I was rushed to the hottest places to say why I had left the Labour Party. One night in Westmorland; on the way back down to South Wales stop at Nuneaton for a hot time. Here, there, and everywhere. My photo appearing in many papers, and also parts of my speeches. “Mr. Jack Jones, speaking last night in support of Mr. Gretton Ward, said . . .” On to Bristol, where “Mr. Jack Jones, Prospective Liberal candidate for Neath, said . . .”

Hurry back to South Wales to act as a sort of John the Baptist for Sir Herbert Samuel as he covers South Wales and Monmouthshire on his Land’s End to John o’ Groats tour. “Now, Jack, we want you to work just ahead of Sir Herbert, and get the crowds nicely together by the time he arrives. Then, as soon as he arrives, you dash off to the next place and— But you know. The same as you did in front of Ll. G. the last day of the Carmarthen ‘by-election’.”

“Yes, but I had a loud-speaker van to work through Carmarthenshire in front of Ll. G.”

“You don’t want any loud-speaker. You’ve got that megaphone.”

It was a megaphone which an admirer whose profession was that of an auctioneer had loaned me for the duration of the campaign. With it, from Pontypool in Monmouthshire to Trearlaw in Glamorganshire, I startled populations into attention. People left their houses and their shops when they heard a mighty voice made mightier still by the aid of the megaphone announce that the great man who had presided over the sittings of the Samuel Commission was on his way to address them, to inform, enlighten and inspire them. “Come . . .”

Gargle, gargle, gargle. Throat tablets—glycerine—try one of these. So on to polling-day, when nearly fifteen thousand people voted for me. The count revealed that the Labour candidate had about twelve thousand votes more than I had. I shook the victor by the hand, seconded the vote of thanks to the returning officer, then had myself conveyed home. "Never mind," Laura said.

Next morning I looked in vain through all the papers for some mention in addition to the small-type announcement of the result. Nothing. In the twinkling of an eye, as far as the Press was concerned, I had ceased to be. One of the "has-beens", as people say. That I expected; but the letter from the Liberal Campaign Department which stated that my services were no longer required—"Here, Laura," I shouted. "Read this." She read it. "What'll we do now?" she said. I took the letter from her and read on. "Thanking you for the magnificent service you have rendered, and wishing you every success in whatever sphere——"

"They speak well of you," said Laura.

I was what someone had called "a torpedoed politician". The "notable convert" was again a mere nobody, a forgotten man——

"And well they might do, for you did very well considering that in your division Labour was returned unopposed in 1924," Laura was saying. "I wonder if *all* the staff-speakers have had the same?"

Before the week was out I learnt that they had, that it was a clean sweep of all those who had been hired to work for the great "come-back". Unemployed again, I went about seeking work, which was far from easy to find, for the bottom seemed to have dropped out of South Wales. I went to Merthyr to see our mam, who said: "No, nothing here for anybody, my boy." Dowlais, the last of the great works, was on the point of closing down for good. Twelve thousand unemployed in Merthyr alone. My dad, seventy-one or two, looking so old in the arm-chair. The boys getting to look old, Ike getting very fat; Dick going bald. My sisters' husbands looking as hopeless as anything; only our mam, nearing seventy, still smiling.

Back home to Laura I went. "I'm going to try my hand at writing," I told her. "Writing what?" she said.—"Stories and things. But I'll have to get them typed, or buy a typewriter. A chap I know will let me have a typewriter on hire purchase, a pound down and a pound a month. You see, Lol, I could, being as I can't get work——"—"It's no good



sitting at home writing instead of looking for it," she said.—  
"Who's going to sit at home? But I can't be running about all the time."—"But you can't type."—"I'd soon learn. And a few stories accepted would pay the instalments—surely I'll get one a month accepted."

She said: "All right, if you think you can——"—"Of course I can," I assured her.

But after several of my stories had been returned to me with regrets from more than one place Laura said: "Unless you find some work soon I don't know what'll become of us." Rent, rates, coal and light and the rest she kept on about. "If it wasn't for the ten shillings Clifford in Egypt allotted me, and the bit Glynne earns, we should be——"—"Shut up."—"It's easy to say shut up. What's the use you shut yourself up in here with that old typewriter?"—"Shut up, I tell you."

Then one morning a card arrived to invite me to a reception in London. Earl and Countess Beauchamp wanted all Liberal members and ex-candidates to come and meet Mr. Lloyd George, Sir Herbert Samuel and other Liberal leaders at their London house. Orders and decorations to be worn. "I should go," said Laura. "Don't talk so soft. Where am I to get evening dress from?"—"Couldn't you borrow a suit? You never know what'll come of it, it may be the means of you getting something to do. We know the price of the train-fare, but you'll never know what you may miss by not going."

Trevor Williams, the reporter, had a dinner-suit which he said I was welcome to. A bit small it was, but providing I was careful not to square my shoulders, it would serve well enough to show myself in. Laura, who was anxious for me to attend, said it fitted me grand. She had done up the stiff shirt I had bought to appear in an amateur production of some play in which I had worn a hired suit of evening clothes.

Off to London I went, and in the hotel kept by Sam Jenkins, the one-time singing evangelist of the Evan Roberts revival, I changed into Trevor's dinner-suit to go to Earl Beauchamp's. Over the suit I wore a light fawn overcoat, and as there was plenty of time I walked bare-headed to where the reception was to be held. Having put my light overcoat in the cloakroom, I handed my invitation card to one of the two announcers, who bawled out my plebeian name in a way as made it sound—to me, anyway—something like the sound of a street-musician

who had sneaked into a symphony concert blowing "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" out of a battered cornet. Something like that—well, you know what I mean.

Dropping Earl Beauchamp's hand, I added to the congestion in the spacious upper chambers. Looking around, I noticed that all the men present but me had "tails" on the coats of their evening dress, and most of them had little medals on the left-lapel. Now I could see what a provincial turn-out Trevor's was compared with the Bond Street cut of the suits worn by the others who could well stand easy with their hands in their trousers pockets. But me, heaven help me . . . I walked like I am told Arthur James Balfour used to walk, with shoulders like closed wings across my chest, to a corner in which to hide me. There I was spotted by Clement Davies, K.C., M.P. "Why, Jack," he said.—"Hullo, Clem," I mumbled.—"You're looking well," he said. "Cigarette?"

Whilst waiting for L. G. to show up most of the Welsh Liberal members and ex-candidates somehow found their way around to the corner where I was trying to hide. "Tails" to a man. Shiny waistcoats, broad braid down the legs of their trousers, and creased—well, as though they had just stepped out of a fashion book. Smiling, smoking, perspiring, I waited, the only bob-tailed politician present, for the guest of the evening.

At last he arrived, looking no more pleased with himself than I felt. He seemed to me to sigh as he surveyed us, the victorious few, and the vanquished many. The result of the General Election was, as he admitted, a great disappointment to him. Yet he looked anything but a "beaten" man, for there is that in him that is unbeatable. But disappointed he certainly was. The prospect of having to wait another five years before he could again make a bid for power; and him nearing the seventy mark . . .

Presently he spotted me in my small corner, where he joined me for a minute. Said that nobody could possibly have done better than I did at Neath. "But those South Wales seats . . . Hopeless. Don't you think so?" I began to—yes, the Americans have a word for it. "Stalling", that's the word. "Well, it all depends, Mr. Lloyd George—"—"Quite," he said, turning from me. The man could see that I was "stalling". Of course the South Wales seats were hopeless for the Liberals. Then why didn't I admit it? Because I was hoping to be re-engaged as a speaker in that area, that's why. Oh, what won't a man do and say for bread alone.

Downstairs I went, fed up with myself, now that Ll. G. and his party had left, and the show being over. I snatched a bite at the "come-and-get-it" place on the right of the hallway before getting my coat and leaving. On my way back to the hotel the elite of an ancient profession accosted me here and there, no doubt under the impression that I was a real toff.

Shortly after the reception I was informed by letter that I was re-engaged, at £250 a year, as a member of the reduced, skeleton staff of speakers required to keep things going between elections. "There you are," said Laura. "Didn't I tell you?" But this only lasted about a year before I was again dispensed with for good.

But before that happened the Executive of the National Liberal Federation asked me to go to Geneva as their representative of the League of Nations Union party that was going to spend about two weeks at the International Labour Office conference, not as delegates, but as observers of a sort. The main item on the Agenda was: "Hours of Work in Coal Mines", and the National Liberal Federation Executive knew of no man better fitted to attend the place where the hours of miners the world over were to be discussed, and, if possible, made uniform.

How fortunate. Geneva. When crossing the channel I remembered my last trip when in uniform, on my way to fight the foe. Now I was going to meet them without weapons in my hand, without a pack on my back. Like a kid I was. Seven hours in Paris before travelling through the night to the city of peace. Up into the mountains—I couldn't sleep a wink, didn't want to sleep—then down to the city on the lakeside.

Our party is addressed in French by Albert Thomas, who looks so tired. Mr. Butler, looking fresh, acts as interpreter for his chief, whose speech contained a reference to something Pascal had said. As Mr. Butler interpreted Albert Thomas stood by with a sad smile on his face. "That man's far from well," I thought.

On the lapel of my coat I wore a round cardboard disc about the size of a half-crown; this was my "open sesame" to all the places I wanted to get into, for on the disc, in bold lettering, were the words: "NATIONAL LIBERAL FEDERATION". Flaunting that, I was able to get into conversation with all sorts of people. But it didn't work with my old friend Shinwell, now Minister of Mines. He was in conversation with Mr. Humbert



Wolfe when I went up to him with outstretched hand and said :  
“ Hullo, Shinwell.” “ Oh, you’re here,” he said, then turned  
and walked away.

“ Hullo, Johnny, what are you doing here ! ” cried someone.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### MY "MAGNUM OPUS"

IT was the Rt. Hon. Thomas Richards, General Secretary of our South Wales Miners' Federation, and also President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. "Sit here and have a cup of tea with me," he said, after he had led me from the vestibule to where they served tea. "I'm having a birthday away from home for the first time."

"Seventy-what are you to-day then?"

"Seventy-nothing. Who are you here with, Johnny?"

"With nobody." Pointing to my badge. "I'm here as the representative of the National Liberal Federation."

He chuckled. "The way you say it, Johnny, makes it sound most important—will you have something to eat?"

"No, thanks. Look here, aren't you ashamed to be seen taking a cup of tea with a renegade?"

"Drink your tea, boy. I shall always think of you as one of my boys. You're gone to the Liberals; Arthur Horner's gone to the Communists; and—all the same, I think you made a mistake in leaving us, Johnny. But never mind that now. Boy, I've been invited to a banquet in some hotel to-night, and I'm supposed to dress up. But I'm too old for dressing up, Johnny."

"You're not so old. I saw Shinwell a minute ago."

"So did I—smart chap, Johnny."

"He gave me the go-by."

"What did you expect? Did you expect him to kiss you after——"

"No, but——"

"Johnny, by the time you're as old as I am you'll have learnt the strength of the political game. I've been all my life in the movement, and I've watched it moving from the Lib.-Lab. to as near the Communist position as doesn't matter. That's you youngsters, who in conferences used to denounce me—yes, and you as much as any—for this, that and the other. When you wanted to take our Federation into the Red International of

Labour Unions, who was it shouted something about 'senile decay' when I tried to pull you up?" Again he chuckled. "And it'll be a strange thing to me if I'm not called names at this conference. We're going to have trouble with the German brown-coal miners, Johnny. You'd think they'd jump at the chance of making miners' hours the same the world over . . ."

I sat listening to the grand old man of the British Miners' Federation, the Monmouthshire pit-boy who was now a Privy Councillor, the chief spokesman for the British miners at Geneva. "Old Tom", as he was affectionately referred to in twenty dialects in twenty coalfields. Others had shot up like rockets high above where he remained like a rock. Hodges and others had shot up, only to come down again. Old Tom was seldom in the "news", rarely did he "make" the front-page, but during mining crises he was the man upon whom the miners could most depend. I wished, as I sat looking at him sipping tea and smoking cigarettes in Geneva, that I could write a life of him before his life ended. It was at that Geneva conference that I said good-bye to him for ever. Cook as well, and Richardson. The three officials of the British miners died in harness before I was privileged to see them again.

Now that I'm thinking of them, I may as well say here how much I regret the bitter things I said and wrote about Cook—we were one as bad as the other in that respect. We went for each other the way one-time colleagues usually do when they become political opponents. But Cook's deep sincerity—who can question it? I know that sincerity is not enough, yet, without sincerity . . . For a few brief years he had more publicity than any trade union leader has ever had, and he wielded more influence than any other leader. He worked himself to death for what he thought was the betterment of the mining community of Britain, and that must stand to his everlasting credit. He had "dropped" out of the news long before his death; but he will never "drop" out of my memory. When last we met and parted at Geneva, it was as friends, we were "Jack" and "Arthur" to each other.

I enjoyed every minute of that conference, during which I made friends with all sorts of people. A fat Dutch journalist who had for a decade been in attendance at peace conferences at Geneva and elsewhere was my most constant companion. He was my "Who's-Who?" man. In return for his services he received from me an accurate and up-to-the-minute description of conditions in the coalfields of Britain.

In the cool of one evening I met the only man who to my



knowledge has cursed the day when his city became the seat of the League of Nations. He was a Genevese business man with whom I talked as we sat together on a seat in a public square around which the city's traffic swirled. In broken English he laboriously explained how in his opinion the presence of League officials and delegates had made the more cultured and wealthier visitors of pre-war days avoid the city as though it were plague-stricken. "Cranks" was one of the terms he applied to such as I. The effort he was making to explain himself made him perspire. I let him talk, for he had a noble head and a straw-coloured beard. Presently he simmered down, and invited me to cross the road to a café with him.

Many a meal at the hotel at which I was staying with the party at reduced rates was missed in order to eat elsewhere with new acquaintances. With an Indian who wore a turban, and who told me that he was the commercial adviser to an Indian Prince. One could fill a book with descriptions of the people one met.

During the days I listened to speeches and interpretations of speeches. Heated discussions, followed by threats to withdraw. Then Albert Thomas or his deputy, Mr. Butler, would appear to cool the air and start the discussion again. Like watchful referees in a three-commission wrangle they went round and round. How difficult it was, I found, to get the miners' and mine-owners' representatives of Europe to agree on a uniform working-day. First it was the Polish delegates who objected to this and that; next it was the German lignite miners' representatives that held up the discussion. I liked listening to the German delegates, who with words seemed to me to build what might be called a phonetic Cathedral. Compared to them the British delegates sounded flat; and the French delegates fizzy.

The Graf Zeppelin came sailing over Geneva one morning whilst one of the Germans was speaking. Business was suspended to watch the airship out of sight; and it seemed to me that for the rest of that day the French and German delegates were more bitter towards each other than they were before the appearance of the airship.

My last week-end was spent up in the mountains. On the Saturday afternoon I climbed up to the Little Saleve, where I stayed the night at a little place where there were two beds, one to lie on, and another to put over one, which was not the case at the hotel down in the city. Sunday morning I climbed the Grand Saleve, from where I looked across at Mont Blanc. How I wished Laura was with me to see that white mountain,

and the panorama of the valley of the Rhône. But she was stuck with the children whilst I went everywhere, saw everything, met all sorts of interesting people. How she would open her eyes if she were at my side looking at that mountain, so high up, dazzling outworks of God's heaven. . . . Some day perhaps. . . . Have to be soon, for Laura is fifty—yes, four years older than I. Doesn't look it though—not a grey hair in her head. A bit deaf, that's all. But she can hear me all right. Some day, please God, I'd make up to her for the lonely years, the worry and hard work. That's what I thought whilst looking at the lovely mountain.

My report of that conference filled about a dozen sheets of foolscap, typed close, but it only got a few lines in the Report of the Executive of the National Liberal Federation which was presented to the Annual Conference held at Torquay. Not that I worried.

No, for soon there was more to worry about than that. All us chaps who had been re-engaged were paid off decently now that we were no longer required. A half-year's salary, £125, was what I got as a gratuity, or compensation for loss of employment. "That's more money than ever I've had in my hand before," said I, handing the cheque to Laura. "Yes, and we'll have to look after it. Pay what we owe, then put the rest in the post office," she said.

"Do you know what, Lol? I'm going to pay off what's owing on the typewriter, then—— But you shall see." I showed her the title-page I had typed. "That's what I'm going to get down to. Read it." She read:

" ' SARAN ' "

A COALFIELD CHRONICLE

- Book 1. The Easy Eighties.
- Book 2. The Naughty Nineties.
- Book 3. The Birth of a Century.
- Book 4. Death's Decade.
- Book 5. Depression—Dereliction.

*Note:* Chronological inexactitudes may be detected by readers who are funny that way."

"But what does it mean?" said Laura. We were alone in the house, for Glynne was at work driving a lorry; M.E. had gone to see about a canvassing job; and Lawrence and David were both at school.

"That's the title-page of a big novel I've had in mind this long time. The theme——"

"Jack, it's no use you bothering with that. That other thing you typed——"

"Yes, but I was only learning to type on that. But this is different, this is going to be a big thing, Lol. Sit down there and listen. In this I'm going to reveal the rise, decline and fall of what was, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the wonder industrial town of the world—yes, Lol, the world ! People from all over the world came to see the wonders of Merthyr Tydfil. Nelson and Lady Hamilton ; the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia ; Thomas Carlyle ; George Borrow—all sorts of people. No wonder either, for there were four of the greatest ironworks—our mam's father, who was an old iron-puddler, used to tell me—— But this is the idea, Lol. To-day, all those great works, the pits and levels—everything's derelict, and Merthyr's a dead town, left high and dry there on the uplands, with about fifteen thousand on the dole. The place is spectral and silent, and the canal which was the engineering wonder of the latter part of the eighteenth century is a dry ditch. Down that canal, Lol, from Merthyr to Cardiff, the coal and iron went for over a half-century. To where ? Everywhere. All over the world. Merthyr more than any other town in Britain, developed the world, the British Empire, and——"

"Then it's not a story ?"

"Of course, and a big story at that. See the title. *Saran*. That's our mam's two names run into one. So our family, its rise and its fall, will be the story. From the time when there was too much work to when there's no work. From when I was small to—— But it's our mam will be the chief character, it's she'll give body to the book. She's been through—Lol, she remembers her brother going off to the Zulu War ; me going to South Africa soon after the Boer War ; then four of us boys going to the Great War. She'll tell me. She remembers what her father told her about the days when Merthyr was the talk of the world, the days before cities such as Cardiff were as much as thought of. Cardiff, London, all they did was handle our stuff, just passed it on. But it was Merthyr produced it, Lol. So now that we've got this bit of money, I'll make this type-writer my very own and get at it a mile a minute."

"After work, you mean ?"

"After work, if I get work."

"Do you think you can write such a big book ?"



"I'm going to have a good try."

Before starting work on the book, Laura and I went to Merthyr to see mam and dad and the family. I wanted to refresh my memory by a scamper around the older parts of the town, and to ask mam and dad many questions. Mam, refooting a sock, sat next to Laura; dad sat on the three-legged stool. Dad is five years older than mam and remembers more than she does, but he can't tell what he remembers as well as she can. It was mam's Sisterhood night at the chapel, but she stayed home with Laura. "For it isn't often we see each other, my gel," she said.

So I listened through a long evening to all they could tell me. When mam, just before we were due to leave to catch the bus, took Laura into the front-room to hunt the drawers for some things for Laura to take home and make something out of for herself or the children, my dad said: "Don't you go writing in a book for people to read all that your mother have said, John, for she's a bit wit-wat about some things, remember. Oh, yes. Now, that 'lection she was telling you about after Henry Richard died, and Pritchard Morgan had his place. Surely what I tell you about that is the facts, Johnny. Me and her brother Harry was together——"

"How old are you now, dad?"

"Seventy-three come—— Here's your mother coming now."

"Where's that photo, mam?" I said. "You know, the one of you taken with Frank a baby on your lap."

She thought for a minute. "P'raps it's in the box."

No, it wasn't there; but I came across her marriage lines. She was married to dad at Adulam Chapel in 1882. "H'm, you'll soon be married fifty years," I said.—"I know the photo you mean, old man Pullman took it," she said, "when Frank was a baby. But where it's gone—p'raps it's behind one of these other photos taken of you boys time of the old war. But I'll ask our Frank, and he'll tell me where it is before you come again, John."

"Ask our Frank", indeed. Dad looked at me meaningly, as good as to say: "Didn't I tell you that she's a bit wit-wat about some things?" For she spoke of Frank as though he were still alive. He was a widower aged twenty-eight in 1915 when he died with mam holding his hand. Yet she persisted in saying: "I'll ask Frank." What she did was to go into the front-room to stand for a moment looking up at an enlargement of Frank's photo on the wall. Looking handsomer than any

of us, Frank smiles down on her, his straw hat in his hand. "Then I come back in here to sit down a minute, John, and Frank tells me. Sometimes it's my purse I can't find. He tells me where I put it—and not only my purse, Laura fack. Frank have told me about many things. You watch if I won't have that old photo for John by the time you come next." Dad shook his head; but the strange thing is that mam does remember things after she stands for a moment looking up at the picture of our Frank, that is hanging on the wall in the front-room, at the side of the chest of drawers nearest the door as you go in—high up, of course. On the side of the chest of drawers farthest from the door there is an enlargement of a photo of my brother David, taken in uniform when a corporal. But our mam never stands in front of Dave to ask about things, for she was not holding Dave's hand when he died somewhere and God only knows how in Mametz Wood. But she went with Frank to the border, as the saying is. Went hand in hand with him to the border, and maybe some little way over the border to see him safe before she came back to us other children. So no doubt that's why he tells her things. "Now, drink this hot cup of tea before going to the old bus," she is saying. I think I have already said something about her asking our Frank about things—if I have it doesn't matter. After we had had the hot cup of tea me and Laura had to hurry to catch the bus.

Next day I started writing our mam's book. *Saran*, a coalfield chronicle. Mam's correct name is Sarah Ann, but I wrote it the way everybody who knows her ran it into the one word "*Saran*". Of course, I was signing-on at the Labour Exchange and looking for work all the time up to dinner-time each day. Then I would go into the little room behind the lock-up shop in which two boot and shoe repairers were banging away for all they were worth, and there I would start tapping away at the typewriter.

For we had moved out of the narrow valley to the outskirts of the city of Cardiff, where we were living above and behind the lock-up shop in which two brothers were working hard to build up a boot-repairing business. They had a machine which when in motion shook the house a bit, but I got used to that and their banging, which did not worry me much as I sat typing in the little room where my few books were, the little room in which I first wrote, and afterwards typed *Saran* in five parts which in all came to over a quarter of a million words. A huge, splay-footed creation it was—though *Saran* herself was not splay-footed. No, she was well-

proportioned, and altogether lovely. I knew I had her right. From far back in my mind I retrieved forgotten tenderness and loveliness which caused my heart to swell, and tears to flow. With *Saran* I again lived my life year by year ; but it was her life I tried to reveal in all its greatness. She, the illiterate, the unsung, unknown woman of the coalfield. Late into the nights, for hours after the banging in the lock-up shop had ceased, I tried to do her justice. I fear I was too much in love with her to do justice to the other characters in the book.

For nearly a year I fought my limitations. "Is your English correct?" a newspaper article asked. I didn't know. Before the typewriter I sat speaking sentences over and over until I felt that they *sounded* right. Oh, I shall never get it done at this rate. Must take a chance. Tapping furiously through the night ; Laura calling down to ask me if I knew what time it was. Days, weeks, months—FINIS.

The first publisher to reject it wrote me a nice letter. Some of it very good, very good indeed, he said. The first part, "The Easy Eighties", he thought was very good indeed. The other two publishers said nothing good or bad about it when returning it with just a printed rejection slip. Many things returned to me I had burnt out of the way, but I couldn't bring myself to burn *Saran*. The typescript I put away in the box with some other things which I was too fond of to destroy.

Laura—fair play to her—didn't reproach me for having wasted time, electric light, paper and three typewriter ribbons on what nobody seemed to want. But she was looking serious all the same, for all the money was gone, and the means-test investigator was visiting us about once a month. Mostly came in the evening—well, about tea-time, for I was his last call of the day, he said. I answered the questions he put, Laura and the children listening. Yes, six in family—one boy away in the army. But you're six without him? Yes. Only Glynne earning. Rent and rates—well, about twenty-two shillings a week. "That canvassing job your daughter had didn't last long."—"Unfortunately, no."—"Sign here." I sign the completed questionnaire, sign myself a pauper, and the man leaves. A nice man who comes about once a month to almost stop us breathing.

Things are badly wanted. Lawrence, who is working hard in the hope of winning an older university scholarship, wants clothes ; so does David—so does M.E.—we all want something



badly. Then the typewriter must go. A young man drives up in a car from William Lewis's, Queen Street, and, after handling the typewriter like an expert, offers six pounds ten shillings. "But I paid——"—"That's all I can offer," he said, drawing his glove on.—"All right." He pulls off his glove again, writes the cheque out and hands it to me. Off he goes with the typewriter.

There is nothing interesting that one can say about looking for work in and about a little city which has twenty thousand unemployed. One just goes round and round, and when in need of a rest about midday one takes a threepenny bowl of soup at Woolworth's; a look through the papers in the reading-room of the hospitable Central Library, then off we go again. On towards evening one goes home to the wife and children. "Here's dad. Any luck?"

There were times when one had to laugh. When meeting those who believed that I had done my eye-good when speaking for the Liberal Party. One man to whom I applied for an introduction to someone who might be able to do something for me said: "Stop your kidding. Why, Lloyd George put you right, didn't he? Didn't he buy you an annuity for going over to him when you left us——"—"Good morning."

He was only one of many who firmly believed that I had feathered my nest whilst a member of L. G.'s speaking staff. Harry Pollitt told a crowd at Treharris that I had sold the workers for gold to Lloyd George. There, on the corner of the street . . . Later, this was, but it may as well be told here because it happens to be the crowning piece of absurdity in this connection. Harry and old Tom Mann had stolen an open-air "pitch" on which I and Milner Gray had been advertised to speak in support of the Liberal candidate. Milner Gray had a train to catch after speaking, so I pushed my way through the huge crowd to ask Harry to give way for him. "It's our pitch, Harry, for the town-crier advertised Milner Gray to speak here——"

"Comrades," Harry shouted, "pay no attention to this traitor. This is the man who sold you to Lloyd George." The crowd roared.

Having on me at the time my "picture-books", as we unemployed call our insurance cards, I produced them for inspection and asked Harry to produce his. Mine revealed varying periods of unemployment amounting to years in all. "What about yours, Harry? Now that this crowd has seen how well I've been doing by selling the workers, let 'em have

a look at your record of unemployment." He was silenced, for, as he admitted in a newspaper article, he was in receipt of four pounds a week as Secretary of the Communist Party. So he dried up and cleared off, and I introduced Milner Gray to a now sympathetic crowd. Deep down there is still that spirit of fair play to be found in the most bitter gatherings of British people, and I dug for it and found it that day. Not worth mentioning except as an illustration of what one comes up against as a "torpedoed" politician who has been connected with more than one party. Still, all's fair in politics.

Anyway, and whilst people went on thinking that I had done so well for myself by moving from one political party to another, here was I having to face up to the means-test investigator once a month, and going deeper and deeper into debt.

"I'm going to move back into the coalfield," I shouted one night when I felt anyhow.

"What for?" said Glynne, now the family's only support. "There's less chance of finding work back there than here. With about a hundred and fifty thousand unemployed miners——"

"In any case, Glynne's work is here, so we can't move back," said Laura.

"Not only that," said M.E., who had started bringing her young man in out of the wet to sit in the little room in which I no longer tried to write, "what earthly chance would I have of finding anything to do back in the valley?"

"Then there's——"

"All right, all right."

The following Sunday morning Laura said that she'd like to hear Cynthia Mosley speak that evening at the Empire, where she was billed to appear with her husband; John Strachey, M.P.; Robert Forgan, M.P.; and Allan Young, the Secretary of the New Party.

"I've heard 'em all speak," I said, "and I'm not anxious to hear 'em again."

"It's Cynthia Mosley I'd like to hear," said Laura. So I took her to the Empire. Mosley himself was prevented by illness from appearing to explain why he had resigned from the Labour Government and the Labour Party, and formed the New Party. After listening to the speeches of Cynthia Mosley and Young, Strachey and Forgan, I saw nothing that was new in the policy of the so-called New Party. Just a re-hash of what I had been shouting up and down the country for years

and years. "No, nothing new in it," I said to Laura as on the way home. "Same stuff as I've been shouting for years."

Laura didn't say anything then, but when we were nearly home she said: "Couldn't you get on with them, Jack?"—"Eh?"—"Couldn't you get a job talking for that lot?"—"Maybe I could if I wanted to."—"Well, I don't see anything wrong in what was said there to-night. Nothing wrong about wanting things done. It's high time something was done." Then, having sowed the seed, she said no more.

After they were all in bed, I stayed down to survey the position, as the saying is. With nothing worthy of being called "principles" or "political convictions" left, it would be, if I decided to talk for this New Party, a case of talking for bread. Also some stamps on my insurance cards, the stamps that would keep the means-test investigator away from our door. Communist; Labour; Liberal . . . If I now threw in my lot with this New Party, then there would only be the Conservative Party left for a last jump—though I don't suppose the Conservative Party would touch such a notorious political renegade as I was with a ten-foot pole. Still, up to now I have had the feeling that it was right to move from left to right, I have—what? Well, felt I was doing the right thing, felt that I was not altogether a political mercenary, which is what I shall be—and nothing more—if I start talking for this lot. Oh, they'll take me all right. For I can talk, none better; I could make their policy sound good. Make anything from Communism to Cannibalism sound good, for I was afflicted as few English-speaking Welshmen were with the fatal eloquence of my race.

There's the rent going into arrears, and—and everything. In the rooms above me Laura and four of my five children and they've got to be sheltered from the rain, haven't they? And fed, clothed, shod. . . . Yes. Where's that leaflet I brought home from the meeting? I wrote the Secretary, New Party, Great George Street, London.

By return I received an invitation to come up for an interview with Mr. Eggleston, the Party's meetings organizer. When I presented myself at headquarters of the Party it was to find the political flotsam and jetsam of 1929 floating around. Ex-candidates of all parties, and to give the thing tone, one ex-Minister in the person of Sir John Pratt. Then there were ex-election agents of all parties, in short, the X Men of British politics were forming up to do battle with "the old gang", "the united muttons" who had for far too long delayed progress. Now there was to be a move on.



"I can't offer you anything permanent just yet, Jack," said Eggleston, himself an ex-Liberal election agent. "But you know that we're fighting Ashton—Allan Young's our candidate. You can have a couple of weeks' talking there at a fiver a week and exes."

"That'll do for a start."

"Right—how are you fixed now?—for money I mean?"

"Dead broke."

"I'll get you a fiver. When you get there, report to Dan Davies, he's our election agent. Strachey's agent—I expect you know him."—"Yes, I know him."—"Committee-rooms are somewhere on the main street—where's that address?"—"I'll find him."

I did before next morning. This by-election was evidently my "try-out". Well, I'd show 'em. "Hullo, Jack," said Dan Davies. "Eggleston phoned to say you were on the way. This is Jimmy Steele, our Scottish organizer who's come down to lend a hand." I shook hands with the red-headed Scot.

"Started talking yet, Dan?"—"No, though it's time we did, both the other parties have kicked off. What the hell Mosley and the rest are thinking about— Oh, this is the local friend who's putting you up, Jack." I shook hands with "the local friend", at whose house I was to be most comfortable for the duration of the by-election campaign. "He'll show you the best pitches, Jack," said Dan Davies.—"I've already viewed them," I said. "There's the open space across the road from the Labour Exchange for every day; and the market-square for the evenings. That's what I thought as coming along from the station."

"Right," said Dan, "always trust an old campaigner to spot the best pitches. Now, these folding stands they've sent along are not a damned bit of good to handle anything like a crowd from, so I'm getting you a lorry which will be our platform during the day on that pitch near the Labour Exchange, and after they've finished signing-on the chap can drive it across to the market-square for our evening meetings. So you can start talking right away."

"Any other speakers?"—"Yes," said Dan, "there's a couple of chaps who walked in from Manchester, where, so they say, they've been leaders of the unemployed movement. A bit rough they look— Tell 'em to come up here so as Jack can have a look at 'em, Jimmy."

The red-headed Scot called downstairs to the two broad-minded Manchester communists with whom I opened the

campaign a few minutes later. "What a fine pitch," they both said. So it was. Across the road from where our lorry was now in position, thousands of unemployed cotton operatives signed-on at the Labour Exchange at the rate of a few hundred every fifteen minutes throughout the four signing-on days each week. Cotton operatives of both sexes, most of whom had little or nothing to do after they had signed-on, so there was no difficulty in getting a big crowd. I called upon the tallest of the two broad-minded Manchester communists to address the crowd in support of the candidature of Allan Young, the first candidate to fight under the banner of Mosley's New Party.

Through the day we shouted in turn. We took high-tea whilst the chap whose lorry it was drove it from near the Labour Exchange and along to the huge, cobbled market-place for our evening performance. Whilst at tea the two Manchester comrades, having proved their worth, wanted to know from me—well, "what about it?" I paid for the high-tea and took them along to the committee-rooms to put the matter before the election agent. "Are they any good, Jack?" said Dan.—"Not for a garden party or anything like that, but they can talk to unemployed all right."—"Then you think they're worth hanging on to?"—"Yes; they're the chaps for outdoor meetings."—"All right, send 'em up to me," said the election agent.

So the two Manchester comrades were my stand-by for the duration. A pair of rough handfuls they were, who had hunger-marched and protested their way even into prison more than once. They were the "third-string", always ready for action. The "second-string" were not so ready, though they were get-at-able. The "first-string", Mosley, the candidate, and X. Men of the first grade were seldom available for the day-to-day struggle in the open-air. They stayed outside the division at the Midland Hotel, Manchester, where they kept in touch with the division on the telephone. There they discussed how best to hook the floating Liberal vote, for there was no Liberal candidate. There they also negotiated with the man who claimed to have the Catholic vote in his pocket. Some mornings they motored into the division to meet the agent. They returned to the Manchester hotel for lunch and conferences, after which they returned to the division for the big indoor evening meetings, at which Mosley and his second-in-command, Strachey, were the chief speakers supporting their candidate, Allan Young. It was difficult to get them into the division for the really useful vote-catching work

during the day on the pitch near the Labour Exchange, or out on to the market-square in the evenings. "Send me speakers to keep this meeting going," was the message I daily and nightly sent by runner to the election agent. For by now I had a new loud-speaker lorry which was the envy of the other two parties.

The two most willing workers were Cynthia Mosley and Strachey's American wife. Mrs. Strachey was by no means an effective speaker, but she could hold a crowd long enough to rest some of those whose throats were wearing. She had a little talk about the American form of government which lasted about twelve minutes. But Cynthia Mosley was both able and willing. With me she must have addressed at least a score of very big outdoor crowds during the campaign, and also scores of "in our street" talks to women. Whilst her husband and Strachey and the others of the first flight were looking important in the presence of reporters, or talking about the hooking of the floating Liberal vote, the cornering of the Catholic vote, and preparing their speeches for the well-stewarded big meetings indoors each evening, Cynthia Mosley was out getting the few votes that were got. It was her work that saved our deposit, for she worked like a Trojan. She always answered my S O S's for speakers.

This was how it was. In a hall a couple of thousand curious people waiting to hear Mosley, who is getting himself ready for the meeting. Across the road, on the huge cobbled market-place, myself and the two broad-minded Manchester communists are on the loud-speaker lorry competing with speakers of the other two parties for the attention of a shifting crowd of anything up to six thousand people. By now the people are getting to know our line of talk, for they are practically the same people as we have been feeding up day after day from the pitch in front of the Labour Exchange. They know all our gags, stories; and mannerisms. They wanted fresh talent, bigger names. But all the "big noises" are across the road at the hall in which Mosley, "the Chief", is doing his stuff. They are there, about a dozen of them, prompting applause and noting the effect of the Chief's eloquence on the comfortably seated crowd. Out on the market-square I and my two ex-communist assistants are croaking away in an effort to hold the crowd in the outdoor rough-and-tumble. My runner returns from the hall. "Are they sending us any speakers?" I ask him.—"Yes, Cynthia Mosley's on the way across." Good, she'll hold the crowd. "Any others?—for she can't go on for ever."—"Yes," said the chap who had that day come



up from the London office as guide to a bunch of medical students, "Bill Allen's coming as well."—"Who's he?"—"Why, Bill Allen, the poster and hoarding millionaire."—"Can he speak?"—"Well, he's in Parliament."—"That's nothing to go by—ah, here they come."

I help Cynthia Mosley up on to the lorry, on to which she is followed by a dark, good-looking young man. "Mr. Allen will speak first for a short time," said Cynthia Mosley. He did, but his voice was not strong enough for outdoor work—and the loud-speaker would conk out just then. So Mr. Allen made way for Cynthia Mosley, who built the crowd and held it until some of the other speakers came across from the hall.

Day and night to the eve-of-the-poll, by which time I had worked myself almost to death for something I didn't care a lot for. But it was the fun of competing for the crowd's attention with the star artist of the other parties that drove one on. For the last shout in the open-air—nearly midnight it was—my loud-speaker lorry was crowded with a distinguished gathering to hear Mosley's last word spoken off my lorry through the mike—which worked, thank goodness—to a crowd of about ten thousand. There was a philosopher, Cyril Joad; a wireless expert, Captain Eckersley; a Rugby blue and international, Peter Howard; and many other distinguished people who had come north from London to see for themselves how things were going. Many of them thought that we'd "just about do it".

We just managed to save our deposit; and in doing so made a present of what was a Labour seat to the Conservative. Naturally, this annoyed the many thousands of Labour supporters who waited on the market-square to hear the result declared. What a howl went up. Mosley, looking greatly disappointed, was advised by the police to make his getaway through the back way of the Town Hall. He shook his head, but he readily agreed to the smuggling of his wife out through the back way to the house of a local lady. No sooner was this done, and he felt that his wife was safe, Mosley said: "Come on." Our objective was the hotel on the far side of the square, and to get there we should somehow or other have to force a passage through the howling crowd of I don't know how many thousands.

We stood on the steps of the Town Hall whilst the strong force of police were being formed into a bodyguard around us; and looking at, and listening to the crowd between us and the hotel, I thought it quite likely that for two weeks' work at a fiver a week

that I was also about to get something which would leave a few scars to remind me of Ashton-under-Lyne. For the crowd had all the appearances of an American lynching-crowd. I looked at Mosley sideways. Certainly didn't have the wind-up. More savage than frightened. White with rage, not fear ; he showed his teeth as he smiled contemptuously out on to the crowd that was howling at him and calling him names, many of which I had been called in my time.

"Come on," he said impatiently. We others packed around him, and the police packed around us as we plunged into the crowd. Men cursed ; women shrieked and spat at us. An exciting experience it was. We got through to the shelter of the hotel ; and the first thing Mosley did when he got there was to rush to the phone to make inquiries about his wife's safety ; but she was ringing him from the local lady's house. He assured her that he was quite all right, told her not to worry. Now that he knew that his wife was safe he appeared less disappointed than when in the place where the votes were counted. Seemed almost cheerful. I know I was cheerful, now that I was without as much as a scratch going to see Laura the next day, when I would hand to her the ten pounds I had shouted myself hoarse for. It's an ill wind that . . .

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ANGLO-SCOTTISH JOURNEYS

As always when we had a few shillings to spare, we went, Laura and I, on the bus to see our mam the day after my return from the Ashton-under-Lyne by-election campaign. "John," said dad, "a man in the Nelson told me that you've finished with the Liberals, and that you've started talking for some other party, I forget——"

"For the New Party," said Laura. "He's been two weeks——"

"New Party?" said mam. "What is there new about it?"

"Nothing," said I. "But we didn't come here to talk politics."

"No, certainly not, my boy," said mam. "Come to have food."

"What about that book you was going to do on that typer, John?" said dad.

"No good, dad."

"Who said it was no good?"

"The people I sent it to."

"And the typewriter's gone now," said Laura. "Sold it for next to nothing."

"Shut up," said I angrily. Mam never talked to us about her troubles, so why bother her with ours. She had plenty of her own. Not a soul in the house working. The boys made a few shillings at the dogs now and then—they had a couple of greyhounds, and they gambled in an effort to forget their uselessness in a town where there was nothing useful for anybody to do any more. Fifteen thousand unemployed; and our mam like a rock in the midst in her seventieth year. When asked how she was, she always said "okay", a word she had learnt from the pictures. A day with her was a real tonic to Laura and I, and it was hard to say good-bye. Still, there was love at the other end of the journey.

Sitting in the bus I thought of mam and dad at the one end; our children waiting us home at the other end; and



Laura and I in the bus between two points of love. M.E. would have supper laid ready—perhaps her young man would be there with her. Lawrence and David would be waiting down until we arrived, so would Glynne, and the first thing they would all ask would be : “ How’s granny and granser ? ” Then there was Clifford, the star fly-half of the British units in Egypt. Sometimes he left Laura long without a word, and she would worry. Then I would write him heavily. “ A few minutes a week, and the price of a stamp, surely you owe her that ? ” Then the letter to “ mums ” would arrive loaded with apologies and love. Never again would he neglect to write. That week there would be two, or even three letters, after which another wordless fortnight or so. He had sent home to “ mums ” his medals and a cup which he had won in the garrison sports meeting.

From thinking of the children I went on to think of Hartshorn—for the motion of a bus makes me think. Hartshorn, the one man who always had a smile and a word ready for me. In the days when a communist, allied to those who called him “ yellow ” and “ reactionary ”, he was big enough to overlook it and shake me by the hand. Then after I had left his side to go farther right into the Liberal Party, he was just as pleasant and as nice to meet. Born big, that’s what he was. Now he was dead. The illness when in India as a member of the Simon Commission must have left something. He returned to fill a place in the second Labour Cabinet, and to die suddenly soon after. The ex-pit boy, ex-Postmaster-General, ex-Lord Privy Seal, was now everything, and I and the world were the poorer for his loss. He called me “ John ”, and now he was dead. Another man worthy of remembrance whose memory would hardly survive the decade of his passing. Why should they, the worthy ones, be so soon forgotten—

“ Tell the conductor to stop at the Holly Bush,” said Laura.

I was beginning to grow familiar with the faces of those who signed-on at Box 2 at the Labour Exchange with me when the letter arrived. The letter. Makes me think of the letters which at critical moments of my life have arrived to— But that would take too long to tell. This particular letter was from the London headquarters of the New Party, and it informed me that I had been appointed as the “ National Propagandist ” at a salary of five pounds a week. “ Report immediately at Great George Street.”—“ Isn’t that grand ? ” said Laura.

So it was good-bye again to Laura, as had been the case for ten years off and on. I arrived at Great George Street to find reorganization in progress. In its infancy the New Party was evidently having trouble with its teeth, and a Mr. Box, a one-time Conservative head-office official, had been called in to put the infant Party right. There is a "split" in the Party that could almost be felt, but who's-who and what's-what I was not afforded time just then to find out.

For the loud-speaker outfit, complete with records to be used as preludes to my speeches, is waiting, ready for action. Greater London has to be "conquered" before I proceed on a "Rouse Britain" tour. I am surprised to learn that I am the only "rouser"; the other speakers are busy day after day in conference on matters of reorganization; and I gather that the "big noises" are not to appear in public until the air had been cleared of the differences which at the moment were threatening the life of the infant Party. Leaving the big noises to settle or split in the Great George Street headquarters, I had myself driven to Islington, the first of the London boroughs to be attacked.

The Cockney driver's name was George, and he was responsible for the lorry, gramophone, the records, and the microphone. He was a cheery companion, who once drove into a tramcar; I went into the windscreen or something, and woke up to find myself at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, having a few stitches sewn along the side of my head by a student, with the surgeon standing by and nodding approval. I was not detained overnight. George was ever so sorry, blamed the policeman on traffic duty, and I said: "That's all right, George."

This first night he drove me out to Islington, right on the recognized pitch near the urinal outside a bit of a Park.

"What if we give 'em a bit of 'White Horse Inn' for a start?" he said. The record went on the machine, and the quiet of the evening was disturbed.

"It would be wonderful indeed,  
If you could love as I love,  
If in your eyes I could perceive,  
Your heart's reply to my love——"

"That's fetching 'em," said George, as the crowd gathered.

"Yes, that one record should be enough. Give me the mike."

For two weeks I fought greater London single-handed. Wood Green to Hackney—what a lively meeting that was.

Peckham ; Woolwich ; Sydenham ; Earlsfield ; Battersea and the other London boroughs. The first question asked at question-time at almost every meeting was : "Where's Mosley wiv yer ?"—"He'll be here later."—"Yus, an' so'll we be here, mitey." At Chiswick the Greater London campaign ended.

Then, before starting on the "Rouse Britain" tour through England and Scotland the loud-speaker lorry has to go to the works to be properly tuned up ; and I go down to attend a week-end school at Mosley's place at Denham. I had a lift from Uxbridge to Denham in John Strachey's car. John said he was going to clear the air with a good old-fashioned Marxian speech, and Cyril Joad, who was sitting in front with him, sighed heavily. Cyril had written a booklet for the New Party, and was evidently beginning to regret having done so. He should have known that a hurry-up political party is no place for a philosopher.

At Denham I met the regional organizers, five of them, who between them had arranged a programme for me which was enough to kill a team of speakers. "Do you chaps know that I'm to be absolutely on my own ?" said I.—"Yes, but you'll have the loud-speaker," said Dan Davies.—"Yes, but you know as well as I do that it'll be no use me try to handle the Brummagem Bull-ring crowd, or the Newcastle Cloth Market crowd, with a mike in my hand and in front of my face. Personality and lung-power is what I shall want there."—"You'll be all right," said Dan.—"Let's hope so."

Dan had an office in Birmingham, from where he had arranged about twenty meetings for me. From him I was to be passed on to the man who had an office at Stoke-on-Trent, who would use me in a score of meetings to Birkenhead, from where I, George, lorry and sound apparatus, would be shipped across to Liverpool, where the Lancs organizer would take charge of me. About a half-hundred meetings he had arranged for me. When those were done he would hand me over to the organizer who had an office at Newcastle, from where I would do a half-hundred meetings in his area, finishing at Morpeth. If still alive I would then go right into Scotland, where Jimmy Steele had arranged for me to open the Scottish campaign on Ayr Low Green on the Sunday before the race meeting on the Monday. "Aye, and you'll have a great meeting at Ayr Low Green, Jack," said Jimmy. Then he whispered : "That's if you'll get as far before the Party's wound up. Look out for squalls here this week-end."



There were no "squalls", but there were speeches which revealed a split into two sections, the one Fascist in tendency, the other Socialist. I play dumb-band, being in the show for bread alone. Strachey delivers his "good old-fashioned Marxian speech", which is applauded by Allan Young, Cyril Joad and others. A young man named Winckworth speaks on the need for a revival of what he called "The Attic Spirit", and on this Mosley and others build the "Corporate State". Rival "ideologies", someone said. Cynthia Mosley looks troubled, so does Mrs. Strachey. Harold Nicolson smokes his pipe diplomatically, and later speaks like a diplomat—could I but smoke a pipe half as charmingly as he does I would take to a pipe this minute. Dr. Robert Forgan, M.P., speaks non-committally—for they are all his friends. "Our Mr. Box", the new broom, stands in the background with a smile on his face as he watches Allan Young squirming impatiently whilst Mosley is speaking soulfully of the Corporate State of the future. Denham is a charming little place in which to agree to differ.

But I had work to do, and my loud-speaker lorry is tuned up, so off to Wellingborough George drives me. From there I talked my way through England into Scotland. In Mosley's division, on a pitch near a railway-crossing, the crowd roared: "Where's Mosley?" for he had not been to see his constituents since he resigned from the Government and the Labour Party to form the New Party. "Don't you worry, he'll come," I replied.—"So'll Christmas," said they. So I left it at that.

When meeting Jimmy Steele at Ayr in Scotland he informed me that the local authority would not allow us to drive our loud-speaker lorry on to the Green to speak from. "Then get me a good-sized table," said I. He next informed me that a batch of students from Glasgow University would speak under my direction. "They're wanting experience, Jack, and we've got to keep in with 'em, for they're going to run Mosley for the Rectorship. Good publicity."—"Can they speak?"—"Well . . ."—"All right." They could not.

Next day the newspapers carried reports of resignations from the New Party. John Strachey, Mosley's chief lieutenant; Joad, the Party's philosopher; and Allan Young, its first—and last—secretary had resigned. Anyway, I had my living to get. Glasgow, Paisley, Johnstone, and wherever two or three could be gathered to listen, there was I to address them. Along the Clyde, playing our records and telling the tale.

My Cockney driver thought "the grub" of Scotland very good indeed, but regretted the fact that the men in charge of roadside petrol stations could not speak London-English. Being a Welshman I liked the way the people talked, and by the time I left the country I was almost as good a Scot in my speech as the next man.

I saw a great deal of the lovely country, also many hideous city and town tenement districts from my seat beside my Cockney driver. He returned me to London just in time to witness the break-up of the second Labour Government. At the Great George Street headquarters I met Mr. Box and Harold Nicolson, and they both complimented me on the good work I had been doing. Harold Nicolson was either editor or assistant editor of the Party organ, *Action*, I think it was called, and he said that some of my reports were being edited to appear in the Party organ for the benefit of Party members, sympathizers and others.

Whilst the emergency National Government was being formed Mr. Box agreed with me that it was inadvisable to go shouting from the loud-speaker van. "It's a pity that Mosley's not here," he said. Mosley was somewhere in the South of France getting tuned up for the autumn and winter campaigns ahead of him. However, he hurried back to London, and Mr. Box had a word with him, after which he, Mr. Box, said I was to do another round of the London boroughs. "Policy as before."—"No," said I, "we can't go about shouting that stuff any more. Now that we've got a National Government—I'd like to have a word with Mosley."

"I'm afraid that is not possible—— But wait outside a minute." He had a word on the 'phone with Mosley, who was in his own room in the building. "I'm sorry," said Mr. Box to me, "but Sir Oswald can't see you."

"Then he can start doing the shouting himself for a change."

"My dear Mr. Jones," said Mr. Box, "if you think you have the right to demand interviews with the leader of the Party to discuss matters of policy, then I'm afraid——"

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Box. I've stopped shouting, that's all." Then I went on to tell him why. In the crisis confronting the country people of all parties had come together to try and put things right, that was my honest belief. So I couldn't go about shouting "the old gang" and such tripe about people who were trying to do what I thought was best for the country. "So, good-bye, Mr. Box." Up to Eggleston I went to tell him that I was off home. "So-long, Eggie."

—"Don't be a fool, Jack. A fiver a week's not to be sneezed at, remember."—"True, but there are some things I won't do for a fiver a week. So long, Eggie. All the best."

When making a fresh claim at a Labour Exchange one has to say by whom last employed, and one's last employer is communicated with. The reply from Eggleston of the New Party was to the effect that I had left on my own accord. So the Ministry of Labour said that that meant a disqualification unless I could state reasons on the back of the form to justify leaving of my own accord. I stated the reasons, and substantiated my claim. So somewhere in the Ministry of Labour archives there is documentary evidence that I once preferred to indulge my conscience to the tune of the difference between five pounds a week and twenty-five shillings and threepence, rather than go on shouting what any intelligent parrot could shout against my conscience.

Back home with Laura and on the dole again, looking for work by day, scribbling at home at night. Articles on a great variety of subjects, some of which I risked postage on. All with the exception of three were returned. *Time and Tide* accepted three for publication in some future issues. "When will they pay you for them?" said Laura.—"Not before they appear," I said. "Can't you think about nothing but pay? It's a big honour to get articles into this paper, for this is the paper Bernard Shaw and all the big writers write for."

"And no doubt they get well paid for it," said Laura.

"Pay, pay, pay, there you go again. This means more than pay to me, Lol," I said, holding up Lady Rhondda's letter. "It means that at last I'm beginning to know how to put words together around an idea—for this paper wouldn't take my articles unless there was something in 'em."

"Yes," she admitted, "no doubt there's something in what you wrote. No doubt a paper like that pays well for articles."

"You're enough to drive a man—— Go back to the kitchen."

"I wonder will you be able to get a job talking for some party at this general election," she said.

"Go, when I tell you." She went back to the living-room; and I sat in the little room in front of which the two boot-repairers were hammering away. General Election, I thought. Who'd want me to talk? Nobody, I said to myself. A four-party renegade was no use to anybody, certainly not worth paying for. The emergency National Government having overcome the crisis, were now seeking national approval of



their handling of it at a general election which L. G. and others were saying was not necessary. This looked like being my first "silent" election since 1922, for there were no letters asking me to serve arriving. Time was when . . .

I felt that there was one person I'd like to help, and I knew that she would be in need of all the help she could get. Remembering how Cynthia Mosley had worked during the Ashton-under-Lyne by-election campaign, I wrote her c/o Great George Street offering to help her at Stoke for bare exes—for I admired the woman's courage. She wrote back to say that she was not fighting again, stating why. She would be obliged, she said, if I would speak for Dr. Forgan, who had no other speaking help but Mosley, and Mosley could only spare the time to do two meetings in Forgan's Renfrewshire division.

So to Scotland I went, went partly to oblige a lady whom I admired, and partly because I was, like most old political campaigners, addicted to public speaking, afflicted with speaker's itch—have it your own way. On arrival at Glasgow I was met by Jimmy Steele, Mosley's Scottish organizer; and about a half-dozen Glasgow University students. There was a car waiting to convey me to the University to speak instead of someone, it was either Harold Nicolson or Sir John Pratt. Anyway, the students who had put Mosley up for the Rectorship were demanding a speaker for the meeting at the University which they had arranged.

"No, Jimmy," I said, "I came up here to speak for Forgan, and only for Forgan; and it's to Johnstone I'm off to with the next bus or train."

"Now, now, Jack, this is important, and it means as much to Forgan as anyone. These lads," he said, pointing to the stalwart half-dozen, "are going to work for Forgan, so we can't let 'em down."

"All right." We all bundled into the big car which had less than an hour before returned from the distant Highlands to which the stalwart half-dozen had conveyed a few students of the other parties whom they had kidnapped, and who were to be held until the Rectorial election was over. This I learnt as the driver furiously drove through Glasgow up to the University, where I was "ragged" as I deserved to be.

There were four candidates for the Rectorship, if not five. The hall of the University was crowded with hundreds of students who were singing and shouting as I was led through them to the slaughter. From the platform I tried to speak,

but I couldn't hear my own voice. The stalwart half-dozen who had accompanied me on to the platform seemed to be enjoying themselves as much as the hundreds who were howling at me from the floor and gallery of the hall. "Go on, shout like hell," said the bow-legged student who had introduced me. "Shout 'em down." What a hope. They made faces at me, made rude noises, mimicked me. Presently they tired a little and I was able to top the noise, but by this time my time was nearly up. Walter Elliot was waiting to speak in support of the Conservative candidate—Sir Robert Horne I think it was. Then G. K. Chesterton was to follow him with a speech in support of the Liberal Rectorial candidate—wasn't it Professor Gilbert Murray?

Anyway, it was the Nationalist candidate, Compton Mackenzie, that got the Rectorship. Mosley was last in a field of five. Strange it was, I thought, when I had recovered a little from the ordeal, to find the students listening respectfully to Walter Elliot, who had followed me on to the platform. Yet perhaps he had had his ragging whilst I was drinking the cup of tea that was brought to me where I lay in an ante-room. I didn't stop to inquire. I have during my life dared to open my mouth on six occasions in three seats of learning. Three times in three different colleges of the Welsh University; twice at Oxford; and once at Glasgow; and I would willingly go to speak at Glasgow University again, but not during the quarter of the year in which the Rectorial election is being prepared for and held.

"I've got to find at least four candidates," said Steele.

"I'm off to Johnstone to find digs," said I.

Whilst speaking in Renfrewshire for Forgan I found that Port Glasgow and Johnstone were the two toughest spots in the division, so I concentrated on those two places, which were the places Mosley himself was to speak at in support of Forgan. At Port Glasgow, the crowds threatened to play Hamlet if Mosley brought Kid Lewis there in his train. If he came alone then, they assured Forgan and myself, they'd give him as good a hearing as they had given us. We promised that he would come without "the bodyguards" about which so much capital was being made by his opponents.

On the Sunday morning Jimmy Steele came to see me, and took me to Glasgow to view two of the candidates he had found. One was a solicitor, and he wasn't so bad; but the man he persuaded to stand at Shettleston against MacGovern and others was a goodish footballer who had never

to his knowledge been to a political meeting. Would I spend a few hours with him, cramming him with our policy. I went, to oblige Jimmy Steele, with the young man to his home, where I spent from tea-time to midnight telling him what to say and how to say it. The following evening I had to go and "open the ball" for him at Shettleston. O-o-oh. Shettleston of all places, the division which is both "hot" and politically advanced. And in it I left our innocent last-minute candidate bleating to the accompaniment of Swiftian irony and loud laughter. As I left they promised not to hurt him, in fact, promised to look after him, which they did. For when I went there again on the eve-of-the-poll to say a final word on his behalf I found he was quite a favourite with the huge crowd, not a man of whom intended voting for him. So he lost the deposit-money which had been put up for him. "You fight—we pay", that's us.

I went to the railway station with Steele and Forgan to meet the train in which Mosley arrived from the midlands of England, where, the night previous, he and his "bodyguards" had had a hand-to-hand fight with the opposition, a fight during which the chairs made to be sat on were used as weapons. I was anxious to prevent this happening at Port Glasgow and Johnstone, where Forgan and I had pledged our word to present Mosley without bodyguards. Down the platform he came smiling, with, about twenty yards to his rear, Kid Lewis, one-time world-beater at two weights, and a couple of other hefty chaps. "Tell him he's not to bring that bunch to Port Glasgow and Johnstone," said I to Forgan. —"I will," said Forgan.

That night Mosley spoke at Glasgow; so after my meeting was over I went along to the big hall which was under police guard. A large, shifting crowd was besieging the hall and demanded admission, but the police refused admission to all. After a deal of explanation I was admitted through the back way, and when I got on to the side of the platform from which Mosley was speaking, I was surprised to find the hall little more than half-full. Fearing disorder the police had closed the doors on the rougher elements of the crowd outside. Out of sight of the audience on the side of the stage I saw Kid Lewis and his assistants.

After the meeting Mosley refused to be hurried away by car to his hotel. Decided to walk, under police guard which he had to accept whether he wanted it or not, from the hall to the hotel. He enjoyed the walk, smiled all the way at



those who from both sides shouted "traitor" and other names at him. Next day he was with us at Port Glasgow and Johnstone, where he had the quietest meetings of his campaign. Kid Lewis and the others of the bodyguard were in the neighbourhood of the halls, but they remained out of sight.

Around the place I was rushed to shout and run to the next place. At one place I came across Harold Nicolson speaking for one of our last-minute, "you fight—we pay" candidates. Went with Nicolson in a car to where the University students were holding a dance, and there heard Nicolson say that if the students of the University made Mosley Rector, then Mosley would be "eternally grateful" to them. The sound of those two words which I had so very often met in books made me laugh inwardly.

Every candidate "crammed" and supported by me in Scotland lost the deposit-money put up for them. Tired and throat-sore I returned from Scotland to Laura and the children—and, of course, my box clerk at the Labour Exchange, who said: "Hullo, Jones."—"How are you?" I said. I kept in touch with him for several months until the meanest investigator began calling at our house again. "Here's this man again," said Laura.

It was to lose sight of him that I took a chance trying to sell sets of *Encyclopædia Britannica* on commission. Carrying two sample volumes, booklets and forms, I travelled about the South Wales and Monmouthshire coal-mining area, calling on heads of schools and secretaries of Workmen's Institutes and individuals. For weeks I went about this distressed area before I made a sale. Each night when I returned home Laura would ask: "Any luck?" After the third week she stopped asking, no need to ask, for she could tell by the look on my face.

Then, one day, I sold two sets, Library Edition, Buckram. One a spot-cash sale, the other on our easy terms. Two cheques I had in my hand, standing waiting for the bus feeling half-and-half between crying and laughing. For in one afternoon I had earned six pounds. "You've sold a set," said Laura as soon as she saw me.—"Two," I shouted. "Two Library sets."—"Dad's sold two sets," she shouted upstairs to M.E.—"Two sets?" cried Lawrence.—"How much will that be for yourself?" said Laura.—"Give me a cup of tea," I said, for I was feeling as weak as water.—"Fifteen per cent of—about six pounds. We're going to the pictures to-night."

Encouraged by the two sets sale in one day I went all out for business, but South Wales after seven lean years was in no state to consider encyclopædias. However, I managed to dispose of a few sets. My last desperate effort to effect a sale was at the Cardiff City Hall. After a few hours' futile "following-up" of "prospects" whose names and addresses head office had supplied me with, I went to rest in the public gallery of the City Hall, where I listened to the members of the Council in the chamber below discussing a circular on birth control. A couple of the councillors admitted that they knew little or nothing about the subject, at which I almost shouted down from the gallery: "If you had an *Encyclopædia Britannica* you'd know all about that—and everything else."

Was there an encyclopædia in the City Hall available for the councillors? Off I went to find out. There was not. I somehow managed to "muscle-in" on the Town Clerk; from him to the Lord Mayor in his parlour. To my Lord Mayor I pointed out how necessary it was for him, as the host of all sorts of organizations and personalities, to have by him such a safe guide as the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ready for consultation. Then there were his secretary, all the councillors and officials, all of whom would find it invaluable. He agreed.

The matter went before a committee, and the proposal to purchase a set of the *E.B.* for reference purposes in the City Hall was defeated by the casting vote of the chairman of the committee, who said that there was about a ton and a half of encyclopædias in the Central Library—correct—and anyone wishing to consult them could go there—or to any of the branch libraries.

That was my most glorious failure, after which I returned the two specimen volumes to London, and went back to Box 2 at the Labour Exchange. Another fresh claim, and off we go again. It was on a Friday we were paid at the Labour Exchange, our half of the twenty thousand, the other half were paid on Thursday. Laura said: "You may as well bring the few things from Lipton's and so save me having to pay bus-fare into town." So after having received my twenty-five and threepence at the Labour Exchange, before going to get the few things from Lipton's I went into the Reading Room of the Central Library for a quick look through some of the periodicals.

There it was as large as life in to-morrow's issue of *Time and Tide*. What? Why, "The first of a series of three articles by Mr. Jack Jones." *Me*. Six times I read it, then

went out to buy a copy to take home for Laura with the few things from Lipton's. But when I got home it was to find a rolled-up complimentary copy from the Editor waiting me, "came with the midday post," said Laura. So we had two copies, still, can't have too much of a good thing. "Read that," said I to Laura.—"Where's my glasses?" she said.

My articles were about the new reading public of Britain's blacklands, where people were reading for dear life now that they had no work to go to. I tried to show how the depressed mining communities were trying to read themselves through the depression, and how this was sending the borrowing figures in libraries such as Pontypridd, where there were six and a half thousand unemployed, up and up by scores of thousands. I tried to reveal the development of the critical faculty of this new reading public, which demanded books that were books, not just printed matter—

"Not so bad," said Laura, taking off her glasses.

"I think it's very good," said M.E., who had been reading the other copy. Laura, who was untying the parcel from Lipton's, said: "I wonder how much they'll pay you for the three. Maybe there'll be a letter from them in the morning."

There wasn't any letter from them next morning, nor for many mornings. The first letter I received from London was one from the head office of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in which the head of the sales department thanked me for the good work I had done in such a hard-hit area as South Wales; and now was I prepared to take charge of a bookshop display in Edinburgh? If so, report at head office, London, immediately. Rail-fare and exes they would pay.

"Yes, give it a trial," said Laura. So to London I went. Before leaving for Edinburgh I called at the *Time and Tide* offices in Bloomsbury Street, where I was received as though I were a real writer. Lady Rhondda was away, but her assistant editor was there to take me to the lady who gave me a cigarette to smoke whilst she wrote out a cheque for eight guineas. "Thank you," she said, "we all enjoyed your articles." I couldn't speak. "So sorry Lady Rhondda is away, for she would have liked to meet you. Would you like that cheque changed?"—"If it's no trouble."—"Not the least."

The young lady returned with eight clean one-pound notes, two half-crowns, a two-shilling piece and a shilling. "Thank you very much."—"A pleasure." Off to the nearest post



office I went to send seven of the pound notes in a registered envelope to Laura. With them I enclosed a note : " Received eight guineas for my three articles. Am keeping a pound and the odd shillings in case things go bad in Edinburgh, to where I travel by bus to-morrow night. Eight guineas. Didn't I tell you. X. Jack."

That night I celebrated by going to see Cedric Hardwicke play in "Heartbreak House", in which I thought Wilfred Lawson played better than Hardwicke did. But it was a good all-round show, for Leon Quartermaine was pretty good in it. So was Edith Evans. The one thing wrong was that Lol was not there to enjoy that show with me. Still, she would be happy in the morning when the postman would say : " Sign here, please."

It is a long ride in the bus from London to Edinburgh, and I was as stiff as a poker when stepping down on to the Edinburgh Mound. From there to the Y.M.C.A., where I booked bed and breakfast for a couple of weeks. From there to the finest bookshop outside London to unpack and arrange my display. Andrew Eliot's in Princes Street is a lovely shop in which to wait for customers. The manager and staff most friendly, and I had the freedom of the shop as far as books to read whilst waiting for customers is concerned. Reading through the days ; wandering about Edinburgh for hours each night. I am not disposing of many sets of *E.B.*—" most disappointing, Mr. Jones"—but I am seeing life. One afternoon I had the privilege of seeing the old Scottish Caballero, Cunninghame Grahame, as he went into one of the clubs.

I was recalled from Edinburgh to Foyle's in London ; from there to Birkenhead ; and from there to Messrs. Philip, Son & Nephew, Liverpool. From there back to London to take charge of a display in a shop rented for the purpose. Hard times all the time, for after sending thirty shillings per week of the commission earned to Laura it was little there was left for me to live on. The shop in Southampton Row, which had been empty for long before I and my sets of *E.B.* came to occupy it, was cold to wait in, and there was no company, or books other than our own monumental work, which I read through the days, mealtimes included. Customers were few and far between.

It was a hungry and almost beaten man that went on the Sunday morning to Bloomsbury Chapel to seek help, and found it. On the way out who should I see but Ernest Brown. "Hullo, Ern——" Then remembering that he was now

Minister of Mines I checked myself and said : " How are you, Mr. Brown ? " He smiled with his mouth, stroking his chin with the middle finger of his left hand. " Let me see . . . "—" Jones, Jack Jones," I said.—" Of course—— You're looking well—— Ah, here's my bus. Good-bye." I stood looking after the bus, feeling savage. Had I met him in South Wales, and he almost down and out as I was, would I have left him without as much as asking him up to the house for a cup of tea ? Not likely. But just a minute.

What if you, I asked myself, were a member of the Government and living up here, where there are hundreds of prowling propagandists who knew you when you were just Jack Jones ? Would you take 'em all home to tea ? It would take you all your time. Supposing he had asked me to go with him for a cup of tea ? Before leaving I would have tried to sell him a set of the *E.B.* And didn't all the torpedoed politicians infesting the city have something to sell ? if nothing else, themselves. Of course the man knew that. All the best, Ernie.

No doubt it was the fact that I would have to check out of the Y.M.C.A. next morning that was making me bitter, and if I spent any money on food, then it would be a case of eating my bed—well, bed-money. Let's hope we sell a set to-morrow. But we didn't. So after closing-time, feeling as weak as a robin through want of food, I went to the House of Commons to ask for the member for Carmarthen. " My dear Jack," said R. T. Evans, taking me by the arm. " How are things ? " I told him. " Come and dine," he said. He fed me, gave me a pound note, asked if that was enough. " Plenty, thanks," I said.—" Don't forget any time you're——"—" Thanks, R.T."

Another week without a sale ended my connection with the Encyclopædia Britannica Co., Ltd. Though I had overdrawn what was called my " drawing allowance ", I was given another thirty shillings to go home to Laura with. And, lord, wasn't I glad to see her. A frustrated, defeated encyclopædian home for Christmas. On Christmas night, up to midnight, there was a party in the little front-room behind the lock-up shop. M.E. had brought her young man, who had brought a friend and his girl. Glynne, who had no girl, was in there with the two couples making what he called " whoopee ". It was his accumulated overtime and tips that had made things look like Christmas for us.

" Hear them in there," contemptuously said our twelve-year-old David. " Come on, let's go up to bed, Law."

"Yes, may as well," said Lawrence. Laura, like the old soft she is, must go up with them to as good as put them to bed, leaving me alone in the living-room to listen to the happy laughter of those in the front-room. I sit staring at Clifford's regimental Christmas card, which is fixed with a drawing-pin to the wall at the side of the mantelpiece. Another mammy's boy if ever there was one. Writes her to say he is counting the days now, though he's got nearly another two years to serve in Egypt. "Oh, mums," and all such softness. Of late he has been addressing his letters to her, to : "Mrs. Laura Grimes Jones", for Laura's middle name is "Grimes" after some Scottish ancestor ever so far back.

Having put her two youngest to bed she is now standing at the door of the front-room, calling through to ask if the fire is all right. "Do you want any more coal on it?" Glynne shouts : "No, the fire's okay, thanks, mam." Then Laura comes on in to me. Some of the laugh she has had with the two boys upstairs is still lingering about her face. Her lovely face. Doesn't look anything like fifty-two—fifty-three in April.



## CHAPTER XXV

### A-NAVVYING WE WILL GO

GLYNNE started to save on a post-office book again and again, only to have me borrowing what he had saved from him to pay the rent or to get something that had to be got. "You shall have it all back as soon as I find something to do, son."—"That's all right, pop." It is hellish, nothing short of it, to keep on borrowing from one's eldest son. What he had saved from his few shillings pocket-money, his bit of overtime, and the few tips he got when shifting loads of furniture from one place to another. And he twenty-four years of age, deciding not to put anything more on his post-office book, but to keep what little he can save in the house, where he can get it for me without filling forms in.

Looking as lean as a greyhound, I was searching for work all over the place, and applying by letter for jobs ; and answering the questions the means-test investigator asked when he called to see us about once a month.

Behind where I was living there was a field into which, one day, a lorry loaded with material drove. I was out taking the air when the man who had ridden into the field on the lorry with the driver jumped down and began looking about. Presently he came towards me to ask if I had seen an architect there before he arrived. "No," I said. "Going to start building here?"—"Yes, after we've made the road."—"How's it looking for a start?"—He looked at me. "Labouring?" he said.—"That's right."—"All right, give that driver a hand to unload that lorry."

There was a shanty, in sections, picks and shovels and steel wheelbarrows. An axe, some ropes, some pipes, a concrete-mixer and a lot of other stuff. "Right," said the boss, "be here at seven in the morning—my ganger'll be here then. If you're living about here keep an eye on this stuff, see the kids don't mess it about."

"I've got a job," I said to Laura as soon as I could get to her.—"No."—"I have. Starting at seven in the morning."—

"What at?" said M.E.—"Navvyng."—"Don't be silly, dad."—"You'll see."

When she saw that I was in dead earnest she said: "Certainly not. What'll people think——"—"Your father," said Laura, "did all sorts of jobs in Bulth when you were a little baby. Navvyng——"

"Yes, but he hadn't stood for parliament then——"

"Now, shut it, there's a good girl," said I. "I shall get one and three ha'pence an hour, and stamps on my card to keep the means-test man away from us."

"That's right," said Laura, "and the work in the open-air'll do you the world of good."

The work certainly did tune me up. Soon I was eating like a horse; and keeping my end up with experienced navvies. Excavating and making a concrete road. "Lol," I said, "everybody ought to be made to do three months a year of this work for their own sakes." Three months I was at it before the building started, then I was paid off. During that three months I amused myself in the evenings writing in some old notebooks an account of my post-war political experiences, which I sent in a parcel to Sir Ernest Benn, who about that time was going to launch *The Independent*.

He surprised me by offering me twenty pounds for the first serial rights of what I had written in the notebooks. "Corn in Egypt," I shouted.—"What's the matter?" said Laura.—"This man—— But let me read the letter again to make sure. Yes," I said after reading it the second time, "there's corn in Egypt all right. Lol, what would you say if I were to put twenty pounds in your hand this minute?"

"I'd say thank you very much."

"Here you are then," I said, handing her the letter.

"Where's my glasses?" she said.—"Here, I'll read it for you."—"No, I'll read it myself." She did. "Well, well," she murmured.—"Whose girl are you?"—"Who is this Sir Ernest Benn?" she asked.—"Whose girl are you?" I persisted, taking the glasses off her nose.—"Yours, of course."—"Say Jack's girl."—"Jack's girl," she said. Then I kissed her before going on to explain.

As soon as the cheque arrived, and it was not without difficulty changed into notes, I took Laura with me on the bus to Merthyr to see our mam and dad. Nearly a year since we had seen them, and dad was seventy-five, he said; but mam would have it that he was only seventy-four. "He was born in fifty-nine, John."

"Don't listen to your mother, my boy, for I know damned well that I was born in fifty-eight."

"There's no need for swearing," said mam.

"Or for saying wilful lies either, woman," said dad.

I took him out to his little smoking-shanty, where I sat with him a while. "Your mother is awful stubborn at times, John. I had the stifficate, but it's gone somewhere, and on it in black and white it said I was born in fifty-eight." I slipped him the price of two pints before leaving him to return to mam and Laura and the others in the living-room. Laura was saying that she thought my dad was breaking. "Not him," said mam, "for if—— Sit here to have food same time as Laura, John. Plenty of food, thank God. Laura fach, you wouldn't say the old man was breaking if you only saw what he eats——"

"Ten meals a day, John," exaggerated our Dick, who was lathering himself.

"Don't listen to this boy, John, for he's not in his proper senses," said mam. The bald-headed "boy" of forty-one threatened her playfully with the lather-brush. "Stop your nonsense, now—— Oh, I forgot you don't like condensed—bring the fresh milk from the pantry, Jackie." The young man, my nephew, Billa's boy, that she had taken a few days old from the side of his dead mother, brought the milk, then returned to his work in the back-kitchen. "There's a good boy. Laura fach—don't know what I'd do without my Jackie. Brings me my cup of tea to bed every morning like the clock—come on, eat a bellyful now. No, the old man don't eat no ten meals a day. Picks a bit now, and a bit again. Then in the night he'll dress up—walking-stick an' all, an' his moustache brushed back—an' he's off down town to the Great Western—that's his house—for his couple of pints . . ."

I sit listening to her. I know how much my parents, under the outer show and sound, love each other after fifty-one years of married life. Out in his smoking-shanty in the back-yard dad has often whispered to me : "John, your mother's breast"—meaning her chest—"is awful tight. That's why I come out here to smoke my pipe. Cough, cough, cough half the night. I brought home a pint of old beer for her, and made her take it hot with a fistful of butter in it. Nothing so good. But she won't take care, John. Off to the pictures with Mrs. Owen when she ought to be in her bed. No good talking to your mother—— Mind you don't say I've been telling about her, for you know how your mother is. And them boys . . ."

When on the way to the pictures with mam and Mrs. Owen



that same evening, and mam telling me in Welsh about dad, Laura is walking in front with Mrs. Owen, our mam's constant companion. "Your father is not so bad for his age, John," mam is saying quietly in Welsh, "but since he was knocked down by that old moto'-car that time he do get bad pulls. I do hot our rhubarb wine for him—no trouble to get him to take that. Then them old boys of ours—John, how many houses could you find where boys their age do live together as peaceful as my boys do with me? Not a cross word . . ."

When we return from the pictures to mam's house for a last cup of tea before going to "the old bus", it is to find dad, in his bit of best clothes, and his moustache brushed well back like mam said, seated like a kindly magistrate in his armchair. His eyes are shining, and he looks at least ten years younger than when we saw him a few hours earlier. "There you are, Laura fach," said mam. "What do you think of the old man now, my gel?"

I follow mam into the front-room where there is no light to make her take a pound note out of the twenty I got for the serial rights of my political acrobatics. She insists that she is all right and that I've plenty to do with my bit of money. But I make her take it, knowing the fight she has to put up without anybody earning wages—and Dick doesn't even get dole. When I kiss dad good-bye I smell the few half-pints of beer that have made his eyes shine. Oh, my dear old dad. I kiss mam, say so-long to the others and hurry out through the passage before I get too soft.

In silence Laura and I walk down to where the bus is waiting to put twenty-four miles between us and mam and dad. Still, it is also waiting to take us to where there is love waiting. Each time I think of that, think how greetings make up for the partings, it—well, makes me feel certain that God's greeting will more than make up for the parting with all that this world holds. That's what I thought in the bus that night, as Laura and I were travelling towards the love awaiting us. Perhaps others travelling by bus between two points of love have thought so too.

What I wrote in the notebooks was the chief feature of the first eight issues of Sir Ernest Benn's short-lived *Independent*. Mine was a double-page feature, with two illustrations, one on each page. "The Autobiography of an Agitator" it was called, and in it I think I was inclined to be clever at other people's expense. Not that I spared myself in the least; neither did I depart from fact. There was chapter and verse

for all I wrote, but the whole thing was without charity. It was frank, and written without caring what people would think of me and my political somersaulting ; and, by implication, I made my political connections appear as bad as I was, which I had no right to do. For, when all's said and done, politicians are neither better nor worse than—well, say publishers. People, and literary people in particular, are too fond of sneering at politicians, and of referring to politics as "a game". That's all right when dealing with the likes o' me, but politics generally, and politicians in general—now that I come to think of it—are no worse than any other class or profession in general.

However, with the twenty pounds I got for writing about politics and politicians, I tried to live whilst writing something else. A novel again. One night when I got home without the job I had been combing the city and its outskirts for, I picked up a piece of paper and made a round ring with pencil. Inside the round ring I wrote : "Rev. Dan Price, B.A."—"What are you doing?" said Laura—"Nothing." Then I made a second ring outside the first, and that ring I divided into six divisions for the six chief supporting characters. Then the third and outermost ring to accommodate another dozen characters. That was my plan for *Rhondda Roundabout*, which I started writing that night on the blank sides of some foolscap of which one side had already been written on.

In eight months, maybe nine, it was finished, about a hundred thousand words. Now the question of typing it arose. "Won't someone lend you a typewriter?" said Laura—"What a hope," said Glynne. There was someone in Duke Street, Kinshott by name, who did typing, so I went to see him, and he said he would type it for tenpence per thousand words. "Why, it'll cost nearly five pounds," said Laura. Glynne said : "And what if it will. I've got two pounds upstairs." That, with a couple of pounds borrowed elsewhere, and a pound later from Glynne, to whom I now owed twelve pounds in all, paid for the typing of it. Off it went to the first publisher, who soon returned it to me without anything in the nature of helpful criticism. Just the printed rejection-slip, that's all. You should have seen Laura's face ; I didn't look in the glass to see my own.

"Never mind," said the man in the bookshop who had read the manuscript in the rough and liked it, "send it somewhere else. For it's good, I tell you." He packed it for me, gave me the money to register it, and off it went. It may have been six

weeks before the letter came the morning when I was feeling unwell. Laura had said : " Stay in bed this morning, I'll bring you up a cup of tea." She brought the letter as well. " We have read your manuscript with great interest, and with pleasure we make an offer for its publication . . ." Something like that. Out of bed—— " What's the matter ? " said Laura.—" Accepted, accepted——"—" Where's my glasses ? "—" Never mind—— Listen." At the top of my voice I read the letter out to her, for Laura is slightly deaf. Upstairs the children came running, all except Glynne, who was in work, and Clifford, still in Egypt. " Dad's book's accepted," Laura told them, " and the man's offering twenty-five pounds down and——"—" Let me have a look at the letter," cried M.E., snatching it out of my hand.—" Get me my glasses off the mantelpiece, David," said Laura, " so's I can read it for myself." Lawrence shook my hand before rushing off to catch the school-train ; David came running back up with his mother's glasses. " Drink that cup of tea," said Laura.—" I'm coming down to breakfast, for I'm feeling all right now, now that—— Whose gel are you ? "

" Say Jack's gel," M.E., now a bigger woman than her mother, said with a grin on her face.—" Jack's gel," said Laura.—" Give me that letter and you hurry off to school," said I to David, who had by this time got hold of the letter to read. " It's okay, there's plenty of time, dad," he said.—" Indeed there's not plenty of time," said Laura.

Such a fuss over a letter and the first book of a man nearly fifty years of age, and me on the dole at the time. What was one book amongst the hundreds a month being published ? Quite. All the same I was almost beside myself, bolting my bit of breakfast to run down into Cardiff to show the letter to the man in the bookshop, the man whose goodness I shall never forget. He was, if anything, more pleased than I was.

On the day my book came out we went across to Merthyr with a copy for mam and dad, and mam came down town with me there and then to see stacks of my books in the bookshop window, the bookshop there in the main street. Fifty copies of it ; on the back of fifty jackets my photo by Elliot & Fry. " Well, well," mam murmured. " Your book. I must get one of 'em in the house to read it for me a bit at a time. Your book. 'Twasn't much schoolin' you had—— What do it say on that card, John ? "—" " Great first novel by local author', me, mam."—" Well, well."—" And my photo's in the paper as well," I said, as opening the copy of our national daily



I had bought.—“ Show it me when we get back to the house,” said mam. I did, and I read out for all the family to hear what the man said about my book. “ A miracle of realism,” was how he started——

“ Where is the book ? ” cried dad. “ It’s the book itself I want.”

“ Dickie’s gone out with it in his pocket,” said Jackie. “ Said nobody’s going to get it till he’s finished reading it.”

“ Well, I’m damned,” said dad.—“ No need to swear,” said mam, “ for you’ll have it to read over an’ over when Dick—— Are you talking for anybody in this ’lection, John ? ”—“ I’ve been asked to.”—“ For who ? ” said dad.—“ For the Liberal candidate.”—“ So you’re going back to the Liberals,” said mam. “ There’s four of ’em standing this time for poor Dick Wallhead’s place. Poor fellow fack, he’s gone again. They come an’ go. I remember Henry Richard coming—— But come to your food.”

I did speak at that by-election for the Liberal, and after it was over I wrote an article entitled “ A Novelist on the Stump ” for *Time and Tide*, and I got three guineas for it. I described in the article how our mam stopped for a minute to listen to the way I was handling a huge open-air crowd on the rising ground between Hope Chapel and the Public Offices, and how she looked at me shouting from a collapsible platform, and I looked at her over the heads of all those people and felt like a child—— Anyway, there she was.

The twenty-five pounds I got the morning my book was published didn’t last long. For shame’s sake I paid a couple of pounds to my boy Glynne out of the dozen I owed him. Then the back-rent and the half-year’s rates—well, it didn’t go far. When I reported my temporary change in circumstances to the means-test investigator as we are required to, he said : “ I think you’re the only author I’ve got on my list.”

I had to appear before the committee which sat in a room behind the office where I went to pay the rates. Showed all my receipts and my rent book, and the committee agreed that I was still destitute and entitled to Public Assistance. So I continued signing-on and looking for work and searching the newspapers’ literary pages for notices of my book. Lloyd George, now a writer himself, heaped coals of fire on my head, as the saying is, by issuing for publication a letter in which he said my book was a great book. This I hardly expected after the rather off-handed way, to say the least, I had referred to

him in what I had written for the *Independent* that time. Lloyd George is far from being the small-minded man that some people try to make him out to be. My book had some very good notices ; and I was invited by Lady Rhondda to attend a literary luncheon at the Gargoyle Club, London. So I went, for, as Laura said when she was pressing my striped trousers, the trousers of what the children called my "statesman's suit", as Laura said : "Yes, go, for you never know what might come of it."

At the Gargoyle Club the first man I met as I stepped off the lift was Sean O'Casey. I made myself known to him, reminded him that I was the chap he had sent seven guineas to for the Cwm Explosion dependents' fund. He introduced me to R. Ellis Roberts, who asked me what I was having to drink. But I was afraid of losing Sean, so I said : "Nothing, thank you." Stood talking between the rooms to Sean, who supposed that I must have written something to be there. "Yes," I said, "I'm the author of *Rhondda Roundabout*." He had not heard of it, wasn't doing much reading.—"Or writing either," I said. "Not a hell of a lot." So I went on to say how much I had—well, not enjoyed, but had been impressed by his *Juno* and *The Plough* when James Bernard Fagan presented them at the New Theatre, I think it was. I saw them when in London attending conferences at the Kingsway Hall. "And if you'll excuse me saying so, that's the kind of play you should keep on writing. Plays about what you learnt from life, not plays that you learnt to write from books, such as what you've been writing lately."—"Oh," he said, "them plays you speak of wouldn't satisfy me now."—"Neither do the plays you're at satisfy me now," said I.—"To hell with the plays," he said. "How're the poor bloody miners faring these days?" I told him.

We moved forward to where Sean's wife was sitting. After a word with her I moved forward to pay my respects to Lady Rhondda, who said : "So glad you were able to come." As she smiled she wiped forty-six years off the slate, and I was, for a few seconds, the ragged-trouserer toddler who was at the tail of a procession singing "D. A. Thomas, Rou-Ron", and cheering the young man who in 1888 was the idol of the Liberals of my home town.

We were being waved to our places at the table, mine was between Ellen Wilkinson and Winifred Holtby. I couldn't see Shaw. "I thought Shaw was to be here," I said to Miss Holtby.—"He was, but he's been called to rehearsal of two of

his plays that are being done at Regent's Park—though Mrs. Shaw is here. There she is."

I looked half-right to where Mrs. Shaw was sitting. "You shall introduce me to her later," said I to Miss Holtby, "for I like the look of the old lady. All the same, it's disappointing to learn that Shaw's not coming, for I was hoping to have had a word with him."

Still, perhaps it was better to be without Shaw, for wherever Shaw is it is a case of Shaw first and the rest nowhere, I should think. As it was everybody had a show, the talk was free and general, which I do not think would have been the case had the grand old man been there. Little did I then think that I was seeing the last of Winifred Holtby. Now that I come to think of it there was something about her which made her conversation—how shall I put it? Perhaps "urgent" is the best word. There was eating and drinking which scarcely interrupted what was to be our last talk. It would be easy now for me to fill a few pages with the things she said, for she talked a lot, talked the rest of the company out of mind, talked until it was a sort of mental "close-up" of her I got until people began to rise from where they were sitting. Then she said: "Come along, let me introduce you to Mrs. Shaw." Those were the last words I heard her speak.

I liked the look of Mrs. Shaw, for she looked to me what I think our mam would have looked like had she not borne twelve children. The look in her eyes was the same as our mam's, so I found it easy to talk to her. So I talked a mile a minute, and made her laugh by relating how I had talked about Shaw and his work in the hope of getting people to book for the performances of four of his plays which the Macdona Players had performed at Blaengarw.

"Where is Blaengarw?—for I must tell my husband this."

I told her that Blaengarw was a small dead-end mining township of one of our South Wales mining valleys, the Garw Valley by name.

"Do they really like my husband's plays in South Wales?"

"He'll soon be our most popular playwright, for now the amateurs are taking him up." Which was true, and remarkable, for not so long ago Shaw was anti-Christ to Welsh non-conformity, but after his "Saint Joan" had had time to sink in, our chapels allowed their young people to perform his plays. Then I earned a guinea by writing for the Welsh page of the *Daily Herald* an article entitled: "Shaw Conquers Welsh Nonconformity". I also wrote another article for the same



paper on the need for a Welsh Writers' Congress before some of the Labour councillors at conferences objected to renegades such as they said I was getting a show "in our paper", as they called it. Later, that was, but I put it in here because I don't want to have to refer to Shaw's name again.

As I was talking to Mrs. Shaw some other lady came to say that she had to fly, and I could see the party was breaking up. So I left Mrs. Shaw and walked across to where O'Casey was telling Ellen Wilkinson what he thought of the leadership of the Labour movement.

"S'long, O'Casey," I said.—"S'long, Jack. I'll read that play of yours."—"It's a novel," I said. "S'long." Lady Rhondda and her assistant-editor, Miss Gaye, were returning from the lift to which they had escorted Mrs. Shaw, so I thanked them for a most interesting time, for to me it was most interesting to meet people I had read so much about. In all there must have been about thirty writers there. However, I don't think I shall bother to go to any more literary luncheons or parties.

I did a matinée, less the first act, before returning home to Laura.

Soon after that I got a job, a real job, as assistant-manager of a three-thousand-seat cinema. Four pounds a week less insurance stamps. A man who had in 1929 been a Liberal candidate was interested in a number of cinemas, and it was he got me the job. "There," said Laura, "something like a job at last." The cinema was situated in Swansea, and to appear there I had to buy a dinner-suit and a couple of stiff shirts. For the first few weeks I wore an old dinner-suit which had grown rather too shabby for the manager of The Rialto, then I got my own seventy-shillings-worth from Burton's.

From the small Rialto Cinema I was transferred to the new and glorious and most commodious Plaza Cinema, which has a couple of restaurants and a huge organ. It was a huge place in which well-wishers hoped that I would settle down for life. Now fifty years of age it was high-time I settled down. But before I had been there a month I paid a pound down on a Remington typewriter, and instead of closely and constantly supervising the staff of seventy I went about like a man in a trance thinking about the stories I intended tapping out of my typewriter as soon as I could escape from the cinema each night.

So no wonder the general manager complained. I had contracted with the managing editor of *The Herald of Wales* to write him a dozen short stories for which he agreed to pay me a

guinea apiece, and it was of the stories I was thinking when I should have been thinking about my work. Then the *Daily Express* was serializing my *Rhondda Roundabout* in its Welsh edition, so, between everything, my work at the cinema was bound to suffer. The fact that I had written a book and a few stories meant nothing to the general manager, so when he found me sitting on one of the settees in the foyer with a far-away look in my eyes at the very time when I should have been "seeing to things inside", naturally, the man was annoyed.

For the assistant-manager of a three-thousand-seater cinema should have his wits about him from morn to midnight. From about nine in the morning to lunch-time he has to be preparing for opening-time at 1.45 p.m. From opening-time to closing-time is rather a long time. Three shows a day—"SILENCE." Eighteen shows a week—nineteen when there is a special children's matinée on Saturday morning—"SILENCE." Only the shadows—"Sound on film"—are allowed to disturb the silence of the darkened interior, in which I am expected to move about softly. Supervising. "Were there more than twenty-four hours a day . . ."

Forgetting one thing after the other, things most important. "Oh, Mr. Jones, what are you thinking about?" Two cafés, the lounge and everything. The thousands of patrons looking for a smile from the assistant-manager who more often than not stood looking wooden as they passed by on their way in or out were disappointed in me.

Whilst employed at the cinema I again looked upon two men with whom I had once been associated in the world of politics, and who were now the recognized leaders of the two extremes of Communism and Fascism in Britain. Harry Pollitt, the "Stalin" of Britain, I saw one morning as he was on his way to the Assize Court with old Tom Mann to be tried for something said at a meeting. I waved a greeting to Harry, who scowled at me, but that did not prevent me from hoping that he and old Tom would be acquitted, as they were. That night, whilst standing in dress clothes in the foyer, I read of their acquittal in the evening paper, and I couldn't help wondering what might happen to me in Russia had I gone about that country shouting down Communism in the way Harry was allowed to shout down Capitalism in this country—and get away with it at the Assizes. Acquitted, and I was glad, and also proud to think that I belonged to a country in which even the bitterest communist could get a square deal. Russia could not afford to be as lenient to what are called "counter-

revolutionaries " as we can afford to be to what might be called " counter-capitalists ".

Then the general manager approached me, sighing because he had heard from head office that the cinema had been booked on a Sunday night for Mosley to appear there. It worried him, for he feared that there would be a disturbance, a " rough-house " that would cause damage to our lovely cinema. " I'd like you to be here," he said, " just to keep an eye on things with me."

I was there with him when the blackshirts drafted into the town arrived to take charge. Hundreds of them from London, Bristol, Cardiff, to act as stewards. I asked one of the chief stewards if it would be possible for me to have a word with Mosley when he arrived, for, like the sentimentalist I am, I wanted to tell the man that I felt for him the loss of his wife, with whom I talked at the Ashton-under-Lyne by-election. But I could not get near " The Leader ". He arrived with his personal bodyguard of blackshirts a minute or so before he was due to speak. Saluting and cheers as he went his way to the stage through lines of uniformed followers. He spoke of " The Corporate State ". Communism and Capitalism he denounced. " Written questions only ", and the growling started.

The only thing broken was the glass of one of the glass-topped tables in the foyer, broken during a scuffle in which some blows were exchanged which drew blood. After the scuffle the crowd waited outside for Mosley as a bigger crowd had waited for him at Ashton-under-Lyne years before. So the chief constable prevailed upon Mosley to leave through one of the emergency exits leading out to a back lane.

Well, I thought, as on my way home after hearing Mosley speak, and having seen the last of his blackshirts, there's Mosley and there's Pollitt, and there's Fascism and Communism. So let's thank God for Baldwin and Capitalism. Oh, I know it's not all that it should be. Nobody knows that better than I do, for I've done my share of signing-on ; then there's mam and dad and the family in derelict Merthyr. Nevertheless, they've never wanted a meal to my knowledge, though they could have done with a bit more than they have had. Fair play's a jewel. Where is there a country in which for ten years and more people have been helped through the world depression as we have in this country ? That was what I asked myself as on the way home after listening to Mosley.

The historical necessity for a new system—wasn't that what Harry Pollitt said ? I see. With Harry, the " Stalin " of



Britain, in place of Baldwin. Or, if the blackshirts win, Mosley in place of Baldwin. God forbid. I'm not blind to what's going on, or to what has been going on for the years which have elapsed since the war. German Social Democracy—where is it? I'm fifty years of age, and off and on I've done a bit of thinking for myself. Thought about God once in a while. I believe . . . "The philosophic basis of Marxism is dialectical materialism, which is absolutely atheistic, and definitely hostile to all religion. Religion is the opium of the people"—and I am on my way home on a Sunday night after having listened to Mosley, yet remembering also what I have heard from communists on religion.

So I have the choice of two extremes which, in return for a full belly, for bread alone, offer me the classless society; the Corporate State. I might even be a Commissar; or a Storm-troop leader, celebrating either the Revolution or the march on London which are the objectives of our Communists and Fascists. Better a crust and reasonable freedom with Baldwin under Capitalism enlightened. Enlightened Capitalism? Why not? But have you read the Communist Manifesto? The new society in the womb of the old. . . . Thinking.

A couple of months later I was unemployed again, signing-on at Box 2 again.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ‘‘DAD’S ON THE DOLE AGAIN’’

L AURA sighed when I told her that I had finished at the cinema. “I thought we were right for life now,” she said.—“For life,” I cried. “Why, it would drive me mad in less than a year. Wandering about in the dark, listening to——”—“In the dark, what about men in the pit day after day?” she cried impatiently.—“A pit’s not a blasted peeping-show.”—“You’re never satisfied unless you’re at that old typewriter. But we won’t get fat on what you get by that.”—“Who wants to get fat?”—“We want to live.”—“We’ll live till we die,” I told her. “And we’ll live or die on what I get by lecturing and writing. We’ve got a few pounds, and I’ve got the typewriter; and this book I’ve been rewriting will be accepted, you’ll see if it won’t.”—“Let’s hope so,” she said doubtfully.

I had been working on my *magnum opus*, the five-part, quarter of a million word novel which had been twice rejected. Cutting and slashing it until it bled; lopping off whole chapters; murdering many of the characters. The slab had to be cut down before publishers would look at it, for I’m not Galsworthy; neither are people like our mam as interesting as the Forsytes in the opinion of the reading public. So it was useless my making what is called a “Saga” about the likes of our mam. So many of the characters who came to life and had room to move about in the five parts of the original were massacred in order to make a book which could be sold at seven-and-six.

Cut and cut and cut again, until at last I cried: “Not another word will I cut.” Now it will make a book of four hundred and six closely-printed pages. The publisher said it would do now, but the title *Saran*, well, it didn’t strike them as——

“Saran is my mother’s name, and the book is written around her, and for her.”

Yes, they understood that, but the reading public might not. “Then what about *Black Parade*,” I said. “Fine,” they said.

And it is a pretty good title ; you know, the *Black Parade* through life in the blacklands, as some people call our mining areas.

"There you are," said I to Laura, "didn't I tell you that it would be accepted?"—"Yes," she said ; then she began talking about M.E.'s approaching marriage. Whilst working at high pressure on the second and shorter version of our mam's book, it was little attention I paid to what Laura and M.E. had been saying about marriage. How could I pay attention to such a matter when my mind was like a slaughter-house in which characters had been butchered by me to make a publishing proposition of a half-century of life? "Ay, I remember now. When do you say they're getting married?"—"Next week, of course."—"Where are they going to live?"—Laura sighed. "I've told you I don't know how many times that they are going to live in rooms in Caerphilly Road." So she had.

"We must be getting old, Lol," I said.—"We're not getting any younger," she said. "Sit down a minute," said I. We sat side by side on the couch, in my hand the letter from the publisher. "Married," I murmured, looking at Laura, and remembering as well as though it were only the day previous the day when our only girl was born. Next week she was going to marry the young man she had been walking out with for two years or more. Judging by what little I had seen of him he was a decent enough chap, though he, like myself, had done some signing-on at the Labour Exchange. Well, wasn't everybody signing-on? "I can hardly believe it," said I to Laura, reaching for her hand. "There, there, stop your snivelling."—"The first of ours to go," she sobbed.—"That's how it is, Lol," I said, "and it's nothing to snivel about."—"What I don't like," said Laura, "is their having to start married life in two rooms."—"They'll be all right."

I went down to the registry-office with M.E. to give her away, as the saying is. Bob was there with his best man ; and M.E. had a girl friend with her. Laura stayed home to prepare a bit of a wedding-feast. When the man was writing what we were all expected to sign our hands to, he looked up and asked me what my occupation or profession was, and I hardly knew what to say, for I had been signing-on for quite a time again. I didn't like being described as "unemployed" on M.E.'s marriage-lines, so I said : "Lecturer and author." The man looked up at me through his glasses and said : "Author, did you say?"—"Yes," said M.E., before I could reply, "my father's the author of *Rhondda Roundabout*." The man put down his pen and stood up to shake hands. "I enjoyed reading that



book more than I have any book for years now, and I'm proud to meet you, Mr. Jones," he said.—"Then you must look out for dad's next, *Black Parade*, which will be published soon," said M.E.—"No, not so soon, not until September," I said.—"I'll be on the look out for it," said the Registrar. Then he went on to complete the job.

So that night, about eleven o'clock it was, our only girl left our house to start her married life in two rooms; and there was Laura snivelling again. "Dry up, mam," said Glynne, "you've still got me, haven't you?" He was nearly three years older than M.E. He was bigger than his father, I saw, watching him in his rough way trying to comfort Laura. A lorry-driver, and as good a boy to his parents as ever breathed.—"Yes, you've still got me," he was saying, "and it won't be long before our Cliff's home from Egypt."

That dried Laura's eyes. She was counting the days now. Nearly every day—some days more than once—she would say: "It won't be long before Clifford will be home now." And I used to think it strange that I was not looking forward to his homecoming as eagerly as Laura was. But there, I had other things to think about, didn't I? How to live until my book was published and I got my hands on the thirty-five pounds royalty money was a problem which it took me all my time to face up to.

During the spring I managed to get a few lectures under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. Educational Department, on such subjects as "Britain in Transition"; "Peace and Goodwill at Geneva"; and "Post-War Literature and Drama". A guinea per lecture I was paid. I was also frantically typing away at a sort of *Welsh Journey* which I sent to a publisher with the title of *Behold They Live*. "Too gloomy," said the publisher, "and readers run away from gloom."

I stood with the letter of rejection in my hand, raving at the typewriter, squatting under its black cover. "How could it be other than gloomy? A hundred and fifty thousand unemployed for the best part of ten years—many of 'em longer than that. Hanging on to life by the skin of their teeth in narrow valleys where there's damn-all to look at but a couple of derelict pits and the man-made mountain of pit-refuse into which the men and boys of the 'dead' townships burrow for brassy coal to keep the home-fires burning. Gloom, yes, and gloom the world should be aware of," I insisted. The typewriter, cold and indifferent, squatting under its glossy black cover. "Yes, I'll sell that blasted typewriter. My people

are being crucified daily in those narrow valleys, even as I, Jack Jones, am being daily—oh, what's the use. Yes, sell the blasted typewriter——”

“Well,” said Laura, as coming in to me from the living-room, “what do they say in the letter?” I handed it to her.—“Never mind,” she said after she had read it.—“I'm going to sell this blasted typewriter,” I said.—“Indeed you won't,” she said. “Come and have another cup of tea, there's some good tea in the teapot.” So we had a cup of tea together. It was washing-day, and M.E. came with her bit of washing, and she had a cup of tea with us before starting to wash with her mother. And I noticed that she was with child. “H'm, granseer soon,” I thought. Then I left them to get on with the washing, for it was my signing-on day.

That was the day I agreed to try and sell non-ring electric lamps on a commission basis, the “Evendrawn” lamp, guaranteed for one thousand hours' burning. Made in England. With my bag of samples I called on borough electrical engineers; managers of cinemas, and Co-op Stores, most of whom were in what is called “the Ring”, which I fought for about five weeks before admitting defeat, and returning to the Labour Exchange, where my box clerk welcomed me home.

“Never mind,” said Laura, now as happy as the day was long, for her Clifford was on the water, on the way home to her from Egypt. He came, a bronzed, athletic figure, on the midnight train. The male side of the family, including M.E.'s husband, were at the railway station to meet him. Laura and M.E. waited at home. “Hullo, dad,” he said, shaking hands.—“Hullo, son.” Then the others were all over him, and they hurried him home to his mother.

Laura was waiting, waiting for her son, yes, *her* son, much more hers than mine. “Clifford, my boy,” she cried.—“Mums,” he said childishly, with his arms about her, and he standing a head taller than her. During the five years he had been serving in Egypt she had been waiting for this day, now she was in his arms, and her other children—the youngest of whom was now as tall as she was—standing by, sharing her joy. I felt embarrassed and somehow outside it all, for to me there was something strange, yet strangely familiar, about the man in whose arms my Laura seemed so small. Still “my boy” to her; but to me he was also the “old sweat” who had served his time in Egypt. And the others who stood looking on, those other men, and that young woman soon to

be a mother, they were all children to Laura. But not to me. For years now I had been moving away from them, living away from them——

I went into the little room in which the typewriter was squatting under its black overall, and stood there in the dark. Papers, books, typewriter on table, and moonlight falling on part of the table's litter, above which, like a crouching animal, the typewriter under its shiny black overall. Maybe that was it. Other children—dead-born most of them. Children of the mind. Travail without end——

"But where's dada?" Laura is crying from the living-room.

"Here I am, dear," I replied, going in to them.

"What do you think of him, Jack?" she said. They were seated on the couch side by side.

"He's fine," I said.

. . . . .

On the day my *Black Parade* was published, Laura and I went to Merthyr on the bus to present a copy to our mam. "Here's your book, mam," I said.—"My book—put it down by there, John. Sit down, Laura fach, I'll put food now in a minute. That boy of yours home from the army is a fine boy, Laura fach. Jackie, get the milk from the pantry, for Laura an' John don't like condensed. Plenty of food, thank God. No, I would never have known him that day he rode over on the bike to see us if that other boy of yours hadn't been with him to tell me who he was——"

"No, I'm damned if you shall," shouted dad, tearing the book I had brought with me out of our Dick's hands. "No, you shan't carry this book about with you and not let any of us see it same as you did with the *Roundabout*."

"Here's a flaming blackguard of an old man, John," said Dick, smiling.

"Let me tell you, John," dad roared, holding my book fast in his two hands, "what this bloody monkey did with the *Roundabout* before any of us had a chance to read it——"

"Let John have his food," said mam. "Laura fach, did you ever hear such a fuss about an old book? I'll make fresh tea for you now—empty the teapot, Jackie."

Growling dad was as he stamped his way out of the living-room and along the passage and out to his little smoking-shanty in the back-yard, taking the book with him. The living-room was crowded with mam and her family. Jasper, the lovely



black and white greyhound, was under the table licking a paw he had injured whilst racing the night previous. Mick, the huge cat, was balancing on one of the arms of the armchair in which our Ike was seated ; and there was a rough-haired terrier whose tail and head showed from under the three-legged stool on which Dick sat. "Out with these old dogs," cried my married sister Mary Jane.—"Oh, leave them alone," said mam. "Poor old Jasper hurt his foot in the race last night, John. But he won all the same."

Mam is fond of animals. She had a monkey for years before she presented it to the Bristol Zoo after he had bitten several members of the family. She almost broke her heart after Alec, which was the monkey's name, and she paid our Ike's rail-fare to go to Bristol Zoo to see how he was getting on there.

After having had food, I left Laura with mam and the others and went out to dad's smoking-shanty, where I found him with his glasses on, my book open on his knees. I tried to slip the usual shilling into his hand, but he shook his head angrily as he pulled his hand away. "What's up, dad?" I said.—"How is this your mother's book more than mine, John?" Seeing that he was feeling hurt, I tried to explain. "For reading it's yours before anybody's. Why I said it was mam's book is because she's in it by her proper name."—"Then it's your mother you've put in this book?"—"Well, it is—and it isn't. We're all in it in a way, but only mam by her proper name. The theme is chiefly Merthyr from when I was born to——"—"Who am I supposed to be in it?"—"You'll know when you've read it. Here, take this shilling before any of the others come out and see us."

He took the shilling, at the same time muttering : "You're all the same—yes, the damned lot of you. From you to the youngest, you're all mam, mam, mam." I waited in vain that day for the little bit of comedy which I so much enjoyed when slipping him a shilling on the quiet. The stage whisper as he took it : "From north, south, east or west, this is the first shilling I've seen since you were here last." Then the wrapping of the shilling in layers of paper which made a sizable wad by the time it was ready to go into his safest waistcoat pocket. No, none of that to-day, for he really was hurt.

But he was his old self again by the time we were leaving to catch the bus for home—our other home. By this time he had had a few half-pints of beer, and as I bent down to kiss him he declaimed : "John, with all thy faults, I love thee

still." His breath was beery, yet it wasn't the beer that spoke when he sincerely and soberly blessed me. I left him sitting in the armchair ; mam came to the front door with us. Those partings.

Our mam's book, as I called it, had a very good press indeed. The Communist *Daily Worker* joined with the "Church of England" Newspaper and *The Methodist Recorder* in praise of it. H. G. Wells wrote me twice to say that it was "a great book", and I sent his opinion on to the sales manager in the hope it would help to sell a few copies, as it no doubt did.

It had only one bad review out of nearly a hundred, but that one bad review was practically on our mam's doorstep, or rather on the literary page of the *Merthyr Express*, the weekly paper that was started in our town the year our mam was born, the year 1864. Now, in 1935, the old paper in which our mam had so much faith—for it was the first paper out of which dad read bits aloud to her on Sundays when we were all small—described my book as one likely to injure "the fair fame of the town". That was the first time I got to know that it had a fairer fame than other industrial towns. Anyway, that's what the reviewer, a retired schoolmaster, said, and that started a controversy which ultimately placed the B.B.C. on the horns of a dilemma.

For no sooner had the reviewer in our town's weekly paper said that my book was likely to "injure the town's fair fame", than up jumps a chap living in London. He wrote an article for our national daily newspaper entitled: "In Defence of Merthyr after reading *Black Parade*." He also wrote a long letter to the Editor of the *Merthyr Express*, in which he condemned my book. "Your book's making a lot of old fuss, John," said mam.—"Yes," I said. "It's banned in the Public Library of the parish I live in."—"What's 'banned'?" said mam.—"Well, refusing it a place on the shelves, refusing to get it for borrowers who have suggested it. The library committee think the same as this chap who's been writing to the *Merthyr Express*."—"Don't bother your head," said mam. Then she smiled and added: "If I was to put in a book what I remember about how things were—— But don't bother your head with 'em."

I didn't, but later, when the book had been adapted for broadcasting as a play-cycle of three plays, making a sort of coalfield cavalcade, His Worship the Mayor of Merthyr, the Chamber of Trade and the Rotary Club protested against the broadcasting of radio plays adapted by me from my book.

The B.B.C. bowed before the storm, and, "for reasons of policy", cancelled the broadcasts of the play-cycle of three plays which I had adapted.

For nine days I was in all the papers; the mysterious and still unknown feature-writer whose imaginary interviews written for the *Western Mail* are world-famous by now, added me to his long list of victims. Actually had the best photo I've ever had taken illustrating what "The Junior Member for Treorchy" had written about me in his weekly imaginary interview. For nine days the controversy raged, as the saying is. A Justice of the Peace who was also an ex-President of the Welsh Congregational Union of Chapels, wrote to the Editor of the *Western Mail* to say that he had for 64 years lived in the district which was the setting of my book, and that it was a true picture. Being a member of the borough council who sat with His Worship the Mayor in council chamber and on the Bench, he annoyed His Worship the Mayor by refusing to associate himself with what His Worship the Mayor said, in a letter to the press, was a united Town's protest. The Mayor, in his letter, said my book was not fit for a Christian to read, which was evidently the reason why he himself had refrained from reading it up to the time he made his protest against the broadcasting of plays adapted from it. It was sufficient for him that certain townspeople had given him to understand "that certain portions of this book give an unfair and detrimental picture of the town, which I am anxious should not be broadcast . . ."

An M.A. who had read the book wrote to the paper featuring the controversy to say that the book was as true as it was good, or words to that effect. "It is full of what I call filth," wrote another correspondent, who ended up by threatening that, "failing a satisfactory reply to the Mayor's appeal I shall go to London and see the Postmaster-General on the subject". There was a leading article on the subject in our national daily next day, in which the leader writer said: "The defect of nearly all realists is that they are prone to make black things blacker than they are . . ." And a lot more he wrote on the subject, in fact the leader writer made what was headed "The *Black Parade* broadcast" the longest leading article of that day's issue.

"What about the author in all this?" the national daily wanted to know. Then it went on to reply to the question posed. "Mr. Jack Jones, seen at his Whitchurch home on Tuesday, refused to be drawn." When I read that I began



to feel like an important man, and that feeling was strengthened as reporter after reporter invited me to make a statement. The South Wales representatives of our London dailies offered me space in their Welsh pages, and at last the Cardiff representative of *The Era* called to inquire if I had anything to say. "Nothing," was my reply.

Not a word did I say for publication, for in my opinion the whole thing was too silly for words. British critical opinion, for what it's worth, was unanimous behind the book. The late Gerald Gould—may he rest in peace—gave it pride of place in the papers for which he was reviewer. Up and down from *The Observer* to *The Daily Worker*, and across and around critical circles the book picked up praise. From a retired schoolmaster who had come into Wales from England to take up a scholastic position in the late nineties, and from him only, the book got the notice which started all the bother. I only write of it here because it was, here in South Wales, a sensation for about a week. Anyway, "the moving finger writes", etc.

I was too busy being happy and miserable and mad in turns about something else to worry about reviews good, bad or indifferent. My boy Lawrence had done it. Done what? Why, won the Older Universities Scholarship, that's what. Now, I'm not snobbish, but wasn't I proud to think that the lad who had worked so steadily and undismayed in an atmosphere heavily charged with frustration had won through to one of the older universities. "Well done, son," I said. "My mother never had any schooling at all; I had very little; but you're going to get the schooling you deserve." For it was only I that knew how he had worked, and the conditions he had worked under. Why, the day he had to go up to the college for his *viva voce*, as I think they call it, there wasn't any money for rail-fare, so I went and borrowed a pound note from Edgar Chappell. "There you are, son." When he was due to sit his "matric" or "C.W.B." exam—I forget which—he was ill in bed, but I got him there nevertheless. Said to the chap next door, a traveller who owned a little car: "I'll give you half a crown if you'll run this boy of mine up to the school to sit his exam"—and there wasn't another half-crown in the house either. "All right, get him dressed," said the chap. Laura and I dressed him, for he was wanting to go, and I carried him on my back downstairs and into the car; and out of the car again and up the drive to the school I carried him on my back, for the big gates were locked. He

passed his exam with flying colours that day before I went to fetch him back home and put him back into the bed the doctor said he wasn't to leave.

So that's why I was proud of the lad, "lad" I call him, though he's as big as I am any day. Anyway, he had done it, and now his mother was getting him ready to take the place he had won in the college of the University, which wasn't easy—far from it. For both Clifford and I were unemployed, Clifford had only had a couple of month's work since his return from Egypt. But this is what made me mad. The means-test investigator, to whom I had had to show how the cheque received as advance on royalties had gone, was calling to inquire how I was getting on, which I was always ready to tell him. But this day he called when I was out, and Laura, not thinking, mentioned that Lawrence had won the Older Universities Scholarship. "How much is that worth altogether?" said the man. Laura wasn't quite sure. "Then tell Mr. Jones to call and see me at Park Place, at our office," he said. "For I must know if there's anything in it that should come under the heading of total family income." This Laura told me when I got home, and if ever I was mad—

"Why didn't you tell him that that's got nothing to do with him?" I shouted.—"It's no use you shouting at mama," said Clifford.—"Shut up, you——"—"Will you have a kipper?—for that's what we had for dinner," said Laura.—"Anything, but let's have it quick so as to go and tell that man to mind his own business."—"Perhaps it is his business," said Laura. "Be careful how you speak to him, remember that he can stop your dole."—"Let's have that kipper."

Three miles to Park Place, where the man was waiting for the information I decided not to give him. With Scholarship, loan and grant, Lawrence would have to be most economical to stay the three-year course, and I'd be damned to hell before any means-test investigator should make him explain every penny as I had been made to explain every penny. Let them treat me as a pauper—for that's all I am—but they must not worry him. Not likely.

Half-way through Colum Road I was when I stopped and said: "Neither will I be a pauper any more. I'm turning professional here and now. Professional what? Lecturer and author, of course—wasn't that how I was described on M.E.'s marriage-lines? Well, that's what I'm going to be from now on." I crossed the road into Park Place, and soon I was standing before a man who sat behind a table littered

with papers. "Name?" he said. I told him, then he looked through his papers. "Yes, here we are. Now, about that boy that you've got going to college——"

"There's nothing about him," I said. "Good day to you."

"Here, just a minute . . ." But I was on my way to the Labour Exchange to tell my box clerk—nice chap—that I was no longer a claimant for Public Assistance, or anything else for which one had to line up and sign up for.

"There was no need to do that," said Laura, when I returned home to tell her what I had done. "With only Glynne earning we can't afford to be big-sorted."

"Oh, never mind," said M.E., now within a month or so of her time, "dad'll get something, you see if he won't. I dreamt last night . . ." As she went on telling us her dream I thought of her husband running around looking for work, and the baby that was on the way to them. Laura had already decided that M.E. was to come home to be confined, "until she's safely through her time", was the way Laura put it. Everybody was coming home, I thought. Glynne and Clifford bringing their girls home. There were evenings when there was a young couple in the front-room, and another couple in the living-room waiting for Laura and I to clear off to bed. The only room out of bounds for the young people was the little room in which the typewriter squatted, this room in which I now sit typing this account of my life.

In here I sat listening to the talk and happy laughter of four young couples—for Laura's as young as any of 'em. Lawrence had "gone up", as the saying is. So there's Laura and the boy David—listen to her laughing. They are playing Lexicon with M.E. and her Bob. Glynne and his Julia are in the big front-room—I heard him ask his mother this morning to have a fire laid ready. Clifford and his Doris are in the living-room watching the others playing Lexicon, probably holding hands, to young David's disgust. All the young people who were yesterday's babies coming together under our roof. They are at their ease with Laura, much more so than they are when I'm out there with them. I don't laugh as hearty as Laura does.

The boy David, having failed his entrance exam for the secondary school—which worried him not at all—is now errand-boy for a wholesale firm of clothiers in the city. Pedals a carrier cycle coolly in the lines of city traffic; and on Monday evenings takes his mother to the pictures. Before they go they turn in here to me, and Laura bends down to kiss me. "Why



don't you come as well, Jack ?"—" I want to get on with this, dear."—" Come on, mam, or we won't get the back row of the sixpennies," cries David. There he is, as straight as a line, and as tall as his mother, who might be his sister, judging by the way they go about together, and talk to each other. Not that Laura is in any way childish. Oh, no, Laura is wise, wise enough to be the same age as each of her five children—if you get what I mean. They're gone to the pictures.

I turn away from the typewriter to view the winter prospect. There are four lectures already booked by the Y.M.C.A. Educational Department. That's four guineas before Christmas. Then there is a talk to be broadcast in the " I Remember " series. Soon after that my *Rhondda Roundabout* is to be presented as a radio play. Between everything I should hold out until February, by which time my bit of royalties on the two books will be through. That, with what I can earn in addition to what I have already been booked for should keep us going till the summer. Encouraged by the prospect I resume work on the article " Behold They Live—and Die ".

It is an article about miners, their work and its perils. Now they are asking, through their Federation, for consideration of their claim for better wages. My article is descriptive, " Behold They Live—and Die ". It is also an appeal for public support of the miners' claim for advanced wages. The third and final draft is finished about five in the morning, and it is posted five minutes after five in the morning, so it is in time for the 5.15 a.m. collection. It will be in the hands of the Editor of the *News Chronicle* about tea-time.

Having heard it drop down inside what sounds like an empty post-box I turn about and look skywards. Everything so quiet. Through the night I had tried to write the kind of article which would reach the heart of a public whose valuable servants the miners were. The miners, my own people. I stood there, face upturned to the sky, a soundless prayer leaving my heart. May it do good to the miners. Still, " not my will, but Thine, be done ". If God thinks it worthy of publication, well . . .

You see, for a long time, whenever posting letters of application for jobs or manuscripts of any sort, I have left the rest to God, which may not be sensible or scientific, but then mine is not what you would call " a scientific mind ". Far from it. It's my heart that says : " Leave the rest to God." So I am at the mercy of my heart. Often, when about to start on a job of writing, my heart makes me kneel and ask God to guide

my pen. I say "pen" because I always write the first draft—and more often than not a second draft also—by hand before typing the final draft. Then, at the end of a day's writing my heart makes me kneel and give thanks. Such is my heart.

Sometimes when things are returned to me accompanied by rejection slips, I forget God and rave against what I regard as the stupidity of editors and publishers. But before long my heart brings me to my knees. "Not my will, but Thine, be done." Oftentimes it makes me shed tears when writing of the death of one of the characters. That night when I wrote the part of the chapter in which old Llew Rhondda's wife, Marged, was being buried in the little cemetery on the hillside, I wept with old Llew as he looked down into her grave, crying, "Marged, my Marged." As my heart overflowed I could feel the pelting rain that was beating down on my heart's people as they stood around the grave into which the body of Marged was being lowered. When old Evans, the Bon Marché, was passing away; and when Steppwr died grieving after the loss of his concertina, the tears, the bitter tears flowing for my heart's people dying on paper. That's the sort of chap I am. One reviewer, Edwin Muir I think it was, said that one of my books was weakened by "undiscriminating love", and perhaps he was right. Anyway, that's the kind of chap I am.

My article, "Behold They Live—and Die", appeared on the middle page of the *News Chronicle* about a week after it was written, and in due course I received a cheque for £6 6s. (six guineas), which put us right for Christmas.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### GRANNY AND GRANSEER

YES, thanks to the *News Chronicle* cheque, we had as merry a Christmas as we've ever had, the turkey alone cost twenty-two shillings, and there wasn't much of it left after dinner-time of Christmas Day. For M.E. and her husband came to dinner at our place. Then on Boxing Day Glynne brought his Julia ; and Clifford his Doris, so we were quite a crowd. Laura put M.E. to bed early, for, so Laura told me, it was labour pains M.E. was having. Laura began bossing us all about.

"Clifford," she started as soon as she came back downstairs after putting M.E. to bed in our bed, mine and Laura's bed, I mean, "Clifford will have to sleep down Mary's with Bob. You," she said to me, "will sleep with David for the next couple of weeks ; Glynne and Lawrence will sleep together. Now, let me see . . ."

Next day, 27th December, our first grandchild arrived. A boy, and they called him David that very day, so he was David the fourth, the fourth in line from our dad at Merthyr. There was our dad, the first David ; next our David, whose body—what's left of it—lies somewhere in Mametz Wood ; then there's my boy, David, who is amused to find himself at the age of fifteen uncle to his sister's boy, David. And what a fine baby he was. "He's lovely," Laura kept saying, as with shining eyes she went up and down the stairs.

"Listen to granny," I said to Bob, M.E.'s husband, and my own four boys, all of us helpless in the living-room, for it was the women's day that day.

"Yes, and listen to granseer," said Laura, before dashing upstairs again.

The others laughed, and Clifford said : "Yes, you're granseer now, dad. How old are you ?"—"Fifty-one," I said.—"I'm glad it's over," said M.E.'s husband.—"Yes ; give us a fag," said Clifford, the only one of my boys who is a smoker. We sat helpless like sheep in a pen waiting until the doctor and midwife had gone and we could all go and see M.E. and her baby.



First the doctor came downstairs. "Yes, they're both quite all right," he assured me as he went out to his car. We didn't wait for the midwife to go before trooping upstairs to the bedroom where M.E. and her baby were lying in our biggest bed. M.E. looked lovely lying there with her tiny baby at her side. "Let's have a look at him, Liz," said my boy, David, innocently curious, smiling down on his sister, whom he persists in calling "Liz", the affectionate diminutive of her second name. She lifted the coverlet to let us all have a peep at the baby David, the name decided before he came into this world. "Isn't he fine," said the boy David.—"How do you feel, dear?" said Bob.—"Not so bad," she said. I squeezed her hand, for speak I could not. Nearly a quarter of a century before Laura, when grieving for her sister, had been consoled by the coming of M.E. "I'd like," Laura had said, lying then in the bed M.E. was lying in now, "I'd like to call her Mary Elizabeth after mother and Lizzie." I had squeezed her hand then, a quarter of a century before, for I could not speak. Nodded my head. Now that baby had brought her baby and—

All around her smiling man-power. Faces of men. Behind them the wise women in whispered conference. The face nearest to M.E.'s is the face of her husband. The dark young man next to him is a college undergraduate; next to him a lorry-driver; next to him the fleet-footed fly-half of army and civilian rugger teams, now unemployed. Then the boy, David, the city errand-boy whose carrier cycle is downstairs in the back-kitchen—he is moving around to the new David's side of the bed to have a closer look at him when Laura says: "Now, down you go—be careful, David," as he lifts the shawl off the baby's face.—"Come on, lads," I said, leading the way downstairs again.

The baby brought us luck, Laura thought, when in less than a month after he was born both Clifford and I were in employment. Mine was a temporary job as enumerator during the overcrowding survey: it only lasted three weeks; but Clifford's job looks like being a permanency. For three weeks I went around asking: "How many rooms in this house? and how many in family?" Three pounds a week less health and unemployment insurance payments.

When that finished, whilst waiting for something else to turn up, I went on working on the novel with the provisional title of *Shadow-Show*, the novel which I hoped would reveal the romance of the world of the cinema as well as Vicki Baum and Arnold Bennett had in *Grand Hotel* and *Imperial Palace* revealed the

romantic life of the hotel world. My *Shadow-Show* opened thus : " Happy-ending incidental music pierced the tainted darkness as the shadows of two young persons resident in Hollywood came together to fade-out on a kiss." Not a bad opening. The publisher when rejecting the book said that the documentary part was great stuff, but, on the whole . . . In one mad month I rewrote it, strengthening the " story " ; and now I thought it rather good. Here's a brief synopsis of the story.

An elderly sol-fa musician and conductor who is a steel-worker has one son he has had trained in the hope that he will be the Elgar of Wales. The son returns a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and other things besides to play the organ in his father's chapel, the chapel in which his father leads the singing, and where he has led it for over thirty years. The old man also leads the District Choral Society, with which he has been giving only two oratorios for the thirty years : " Elijah " and " The Messiah " alternately. He is anxious that his talented musician of a son shall take over the Choral Society, and make it more famous than he—for the old man is as a musician what I am as a writer, you know, of the smash-and-grab type—has been able to. " You've had the training," said the old conductor. " All I know is the bit I've picked up."

The young man said : " All right, dad, I'll take over after your farewell performance of the ' Elijah '." And the old man is happy, " Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace", is how he feels. But there is a huge cinema being rushed up, one of those places the old man has always warned the young people of the chapel against. The cinema is to have one of the latest and greatest Christcompter Organs, " A Wonder Organ ". Who is to play it ? The managing director has heard of the old conductor's talented son. He must be got. " Say, what you get playing the organ in that chapel's chicken-feed. We are prepared to pay you a salary of—" Then they go on to assure him that he will soon be " on the air " as well.

To cut a long story short, he falls for it. " What ? " cries the old conductor. Then, when his son starts playing " at that place, playing *rubbish* to the trash who go there", as the old man puts it, all is over between them. " I have no son . . ."

The poor old mother, loving them both, hardly knows what to say or do. " Never mention his name to me," cries the old man. The young man goes on playing the wonder organ, and broadcasts each alternate week on the Regional, and once a

month to the Empire. I follow him around the cinema, and this gives me a chance to write the documentary stuff the publisher was so pleased with. I make him fall for a lovely cinema attendant who whilst on duty wears trousers. He marries her, they have a son, then it is a case of "A little child shall lead them". There is a reconciliation, a happy ending, and we leave the old conductor with his little grandson on his knee in front of the little American organ in the front-room, the same little organ on which the child's father had had his first lessons when a baby. The old conductor is going to try again to produce the Elgar of Wales. "My son has failed me, but my son's son will wipe away my shame." That was the story; and around it surged the life and the death in life of the huge three-thousand-seater cinema.

The idea wasn't bad, but the way I worked it out—or up—evidently must have been, for again the publisher returned it with regret. Into the old box it went to join the scribblings and scripts which had suffered rejection. "Never mind," said Laura.—"I'll sell that blasted typewriter."—"Indeed you won't," she said.—"If that," I cried, pointing towards the typewriter squatting under its glossy black covering, "if that was taken away from this house, then I'd come to my senses."—"Don't be silly," she said. "It'll always come handy to write letters with if you happened to get a job canvassing or travelling."—"If?"—"Then Lawrie might like the use of it to type out some papers ready for an exam or something."—"You talk as though I'd finished with it, stopped trying to write."—"Oh, no. It was you spoke of selling it. Come and have a cup of tea." Into the living-room with her I went.

It was my tongue that kept the pot boiling for the next few months. I was fortunate enough to be booked to broadcast a half-dozen ten-minute talks under the heading of "Around and About", a weekly causerie on current events which I was as well able as most men in the region to do. There were also a few lectures at unemployed men's clubs. "It seems I can talk better than I can write," I said to Laura.—"Oh, I don't know," she said.—"What is it that you don't know?"—"Well," she said, "your *Rhondda Roundabout* was all right."—"But not my *Black Parade*," I snapped, for Laura was one of the few who didn't like the book which I thought most of.—"It would have been all right if you'd kept it clean. People don't need to pay seven-and-six to read bad language."—"Oh, the same old tale," I cried impatiently. "You were brought up in the country, but I was reared in a part of the



town where people spoke like I've made them speak in my book."—"People speak like that everywhere," she said, "but that's no reason for putting such talk in books."—"Don't talk so—so damned dull," I shouted.—"Why don't you write a book full of nice talk?"—"Because I've something better to do," I said.

Laura had held to her opinion ever since that chap living in London had, after reading *Black Parade*, written his "Defence of Merthyr", which was published in our national daily newspaper, and it was most galling for me to have my wife siding with the enemy. I had talked and talked, and made her read the book again after I had taken her to Merthyr and showed her the row of little houses in which I lived one of ten for years before we moved up the hill to Penyard. Made her stand on the little bridge and look down on the stinking Morlais Brook just about the time when one of the biggest rats came out from his hole in the wall to nibble at some refuse. Still she clung to the opinion that there was no need for what she called "one bad word" in my book. That's Laura all over. Once she's made up her mind about something there's no moving her.

My eldest son, Glynne, was now engaged to his Julia, and he was, so Laura told me, thinking of getting married the first Sunday in August; and Clifford wrote to say that, all being well, he would come home to marry his Doris about the same time.

"Then what'll we do?" said Laura. "For after they're married there'll only be David's ten shillings a week that we can be sure of. One thing's certain, we shall have to find a smaller house then, for twenty-two and sixpence a week will be more than we'll be able to find after Glynne goes to a home of his own . . ."

I wasn't paying much attention to what she was saying, for I had read in the paper I was holding of the death of Florence Smithson in a nursing home. What Laura was saying went in through one ear and out the other as my mind went back forty years to the day when I stood looking at the lovely little girl who was the only child of the lessee of the new Theatre Royal and Opera House which was at that time the most wonderful place in our town. Later, when I became vendor of sweets and oranges to hungry and thirsty and sweet-toothed galleryites, I had many brief talks with the proprietor's—for after being lessee for a time he became sole proprietor—lovely daughter. I returned home from India to learn that she had attained to musical comedy stardom during my absence. The papers

referred to her as "the sweet singer of old Drury". She was the star of "The Blue Moon", and other London musical comedy hits before London returned her to the provinces as the star of touring companies. Some Empire tours followed, then back to the provincial music halls which she toured until at last, a faded beauty with a spent voice, she fought valiantly in twice-nightly road-shows. The rise and fall of a star—make a good novel. Poor Florrie. Rest in peace. Now, if one wrote that novel—though perhaps it would make a better play. "The sweet singer of old Drury——"

"What I'd like is a small bungalow," Laura was saying. "Just enough for us two and Lawrence and David. We must keep our eyes open for a small bungalow. If you happen to see one empty let me know."

But as I walked to and fro the city it was of two plays I thought, not of bungalows. One a dramatic feature for broadcasting, and the other a stage play, on both of which I was soon at work, for I drove them both together for a while before they became unmanageable. I suspended work on the stage play to finish the seventy-five-minute radio feature, the first draft of which the B.B.C. people of this region liked well enough to fix the date for the broadcasting of it. "Morlais Castle Daydream" was the title of the first thing specially written by me for broadcasting. It was in three episodes, two legendary and one historical, with a few modern characters for use in a Prologue and Epilogue, and also as links between the episodes. It was well played by a splendid cast, of which I was a member. I played "Dreamy Dai". Judging by the letters received by me personally, and those received by the Programmes Director, it was quite a good show. A history lecturer at one University was most enthusiastic about it; so was—well, ever so many people took the trouble to write expressing their appreciation. And the bit of money I got for writing it and acting in it was a godsend. People who knew me from the photos of me that appeared in the papers from time to time stopped me on the street to thank me for my "Morlais Castle Daydream".

"Laura," I said, "from now on I think it's plays I shall write, for it seems that I can make people talk in plays better than I can make them think in novels."

"Yes; but never mind about that now," she said. "What are we going to give Glynne and Clifford for a wedding present?"

"We can't afford to——"

"We must afford something. Glynne's been a good boy ; and so has Clifford."

"All right, all right, have it your own way."

"And you're coming to both weddings."

"I tell you I want to get on with this play."

"So you shall afterwards. The closing date of the competition is not——"

"All right, all right."

So I went with Laura to both weddings, dressed in the stripped trousers and black coat and waistcoat Laura had cared for so well for seven years, the suit the children called "dad's city dogs" one minute, and "dad's statesman's suit" the next. Glynne was married in a church on the Sunday ; and Clifford in a chapel on the Tuesday, so in less than a week I lost two of my family. And I met at the weddings a lot of people I had never as much as seen or heard of before. Two more families now linked to mine. Funny, I thought it, when being introduced to ever so many strangers, how people and families go on linking up the way they do. With three of my five children married and gone to live in homes of their own, when Lawrence would go back up to college there would only be David left to keep Laura company whilst I sat trying to tap a livelihood out of this typewriter. Still, M.E. wasn't living so far away as the other two, so she would be up most days with her baby boy, David the fourth, who by now had several teeth. All the same, I wish M.E. would stop trying to make him say "granser" each time she brings him with her to see us. Makes a man feel—well, as though he were going downhill. Yet I would like to hear the boy say "granser". So I hardly know what I would like.

After the two weddings in less than a week, and the two boys had gone to live with their wives afar off, one twenty miles, and the other a hundred and forty miles away, I resumed work on the stage play which I called "Land of My Fathers", and which, when it was finished, I sent as an entry for The Altrincham Garrick Play-house Play Competition. I like the play very much, but whether the judges will like it is more than I can say. Let's hope so, anyway.

Having sent the play off I felt empty. There was another winter coming on, and all we could count on were the few lectures I had been booked for, and David's ten shillings each Friday night. And there was the hope of an occasional B.B.C. booking. But rent alone is twenty-two shillings and sixpence a week. So it was no good my feeling empty. All the same, I've never died a winter yet. What about those rejected



manuscripts? I asked myself. Let's have a look at 'em. (A) *Is This He?* a sketch for an autobiography which I had tapped out when learning to use the typewriter in 1929, seven years ago now. (B) *Nice Little City*, hand-written third of a novel about the city of Cardiff. (C) *Behold They Live*, a sort of Welsh Journey. (D) *Shadow-Show*, a novel of cinema life. Then there were a number of smaller things. What to go on with next?—that is the question.

I decided to write about myself, to "write-up" my fifty-two years of life. First I wrote it with my pen; the second time it was typed. Now it is finished.



## INDEX





# INDEX

- Aberdare, 53  
 Aberdare Junction, 66  
 Abermorlais School, 38  
 Abraham, Wm. ("Mabon"), M.P.,  
     81, 85  
 Adamson, Wm., M.P., 210  
 Africa, 121, 124-5, 140-1, 143  
 Aisne, the, 145, 159  
 America, 9-10, 34  
 Artillery (Transvaal State), 113  
  
 Bacon, Anthony, 77  
 Baker, Edward, 231  
 Baldwin, Oliver, 226  
 Baldwin, Stanley, M.P., 208, 210,  
     225, 288  
 Balfour, A. J., 241  
 Baluchistan, 117  
 Bandman-Palmer, Mrs., 89  
 Bandsman Boswell, 117  
 Barracks (Cardiff), 128, 178  
 Baum, Vicki, 303  
 B.B.C., 295-6  
 Beacons (Breconshire), 134  
 Beauchamp, Countess, 240  
 Beauchamp, Earl, 240-1  
 Beecham, Sir Thomas, 181, 236  
*Behold They Live*, 291  
 Belgium, 144, 148, 197  
 Benn, Sir Ernest, 277, 279  
 Bennett, Arnold, 303  
 Benson, F. R., 89-90  
 Berkeley, Capt., 142, 145-6, 147-51,  
     159, 196  
 Berry brothers (Lord Buckland ;  
     Lord Camrose ; and Sir Gomer  
     Berry), 172  
 Berry, Henry Seymour, 122  
 Berry, J. M., 172-3  
 "Best Welsh", 99  
 Bevin, Ernest, 222-3  
 Bible, 16-17, 137, 155, 197  
 Biddle, Dr., 32  
*Black Parade*, 289, 291, 293, 295-7,  
     305-6  
 Blackpool, 127, 208  
 Blackshirts, 287  
 Blaengarw, 204-7  
 Bloomsbury Chapel, 273  
 Board of Guardians, 219, 229  
 Boer prisoners, 100-1  
 Boer War, 87, 93, 248  
 Bombay, 53, 115  
 Bondfield, Margaret, 222  
 Bordon, Hants, 142, 176  
 Borrow, George, 248  
 Bottomley, Horatio, 174  
 Bournemouth, 220  
 Bournemouth, Mayor of, 222  
 Bowen, Dr., 211  
 Box, Mr., 262, 264-5  
 Boxing, 115-16  
 Boyne, Leonard, 121  
 Bramley, Fred, 221  
 Brandenburg, 145  
 Brecon, 134  
 Brentwood, 177-8  
 Brighton, 152-3  
 British Empire, 248  
 British Navy, 71, 115  
 Bromley, John, M.P., 223  
 Brown, Ernest, M.P., 231-3, 273-4  
 Buck, Herbert (miners' agent),  
     220-1  
 Buck, Pte., 99, 101, 114, 116, 118-  
     19  
 Builth Wells, 127, 129, 131-2, 135,  
     156  
 Bus (horse-drawn), 18-19  
 Butler, Mr., 242, 246  
  
 Caerphilly, 202-3  
 Calcutta, 119  
 Calvert, Louis (actor), 59-60  
 Canada, 125  
*Canning* (Indian Marine Steam-  
     Packet), 116  
 Cannon (Crimean war), 39-40  
 Cantonments, 109  
 Cape Town, 100, 102

- Cardiff, 39, 63, 85, 97-8, 120, 128,  
     141, 154-5, 248  
 Cardiff City Hall, 271  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 248  
 Castle Hotel, 26, 39, 175  
 Cavendish, Mr. (actor), 30-1, 35-6,  
     46  
 Cefn Cemetery, 30  
 Central Labour College, 205-6  
 Chandos, Lloyd (a great tenor), 122  
 Chappell, Edgar, 297  
 Cheapjacks, 46  
 Chesterton, G. K., 268  
 Christmas Breakfasts (Ragged Sun-  
     day-School), 44-5  
 Church Christmas Charity, 45  
 Cilfynydd Pit Explosion, 66, 120  
 Cinema, 185  
 Circuses (Sanger's and Fossett's),  
     51, 55-6  
 Citrine, Sir Walter, 221  
*Clive* (Indian Marine Steamship),  
     115  
 Clynes, J. R., 222  
 "Coal and Power", 226-7, 230-1,  
     238  
 Colaba Depot (Bombay), 115  
 Colliers' trains, 50  
 Communist International, 195  
 Communist Party of Great Britain,  
     191-7, 225  
 Cook, A. J., 219-20, 223, 230, 245  
 Cramp, Mr., 222  
 Crawford, Helen, 202  
 Crawshay, William ("The Iron  
     King"), 10-11  
 Crawshays, the family of, 14, 77, 126  
 Cwm (Ebbw Vale) explosion, 225  
 Cwm Pit, 78, 87, 93, 130  
 Cyfarthfa Band, 77  
 Cyfarthfa Castle, 28-9  
 Cyfarthfa Works, 10, 25, 40-1, 61,  
     68-9, 186, 198  
 "Dad's Double" (a one-act play),  
     217  
*Daily Express*, 286  
*Daily Herald*, 221, 284-5  
*Daily Worker*, 295, 297  
 Dai o'r Nant (miners' leader), 81  
     85-6  
 Davies, Ben (Great Welsh tenor),  
     93  
 Davies, Clement, K.C., M.P., 241  
 Davies, Dan (Bach), 55, 77, 127  
 Davies, Dan (election agent), 255,  
     263  
 Davies, E. T. (Welsh musician and  
     conductor), 122  
 Davies, Joseph (Sec., Swansea  
     Labour Party), 225  
 De Clare, Gilbert (Lord of Gla-  
     morgan), 202  
 De Wet (Boer general), 97  
 Diamond Jubilee, 73, 76-7  
 Dowlais, 10, 18, 48, 53, 61  
 Dowlais Works, 10-11, 14, 25, 40-1,  
     53, 68-9, 198  
 Drill Hall (Merthyr), 169-70  
 Driscoll, Jim (boxer), 123  
 Drummond, Flora, 174  
 Drury Lane Theatre, 180, 235  
 Dunstan, Edward (actor-manager),  
     213, 217, 225  
 Durban, 114-15  
 Dyke, Dr., 75  
 East Coast (of England), 175  
 Eckersley, Capt., 258  
 Edinburgh, 232, 273  
 Educational Campaign, 212, 226  
 Eggleston, Mr., 254-5, 265-6  
 Eisteddfod (Welsh National), 93  
 "Elijah", 122  
 Elliot's, Andrew (Bookshop), 273  
 Elliot, Walter, M.P., 268  
 Elysium (Swansea), 225  
*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 270-4  
 Erasmus (Boer general, so 'twas  
     said), 109  
 Evans, Edith (the famous actress),  
     273  
 Evans, Edith (Welsh soprano), 122  
 Evans, Harry (Welsh musician and  
     conductor), 77, 122  
 Evans, R. T., 274  
 Ex-killers, 183-4  
 Fagen, James Bernard, 283  
 Faro (a card game), 130-1  
 Fever (Enteric), 113  
 Forgan, Dr. Robert, 253, 264, 267-9  
 Foyle's (Bookshop), 273  
 France, 167, 176, 197  
 Fuller, Lce.-Cpl., V.C., 145, 182  
 Fyfe, Hamilton, 222



- Gallacher, Wm., M.P., 194  
 Gargoyle Club, 283-5  
 Garrick Playhouse (Altrincham, Cheshire), 308  
 Gellideg (a thin seam of coal below ground), 67, 73, 78, 96, 99, 113, 125  
 George, Miss Lloyd, M.P., 232  
 George, Mr. Lloyd, M.P., 94, 100, 208, 226-7, 231-2, 238, 240-1, 252, 282-3  
 General Elections of 1922-3-4-9-31, 208-10, 239, 268  
 General Strike of 1926, 216-18, 225  
 Geneva, 242-7  
 Gheluvelt, 148  
 Glamorgan, Lord of, 48  
 Glamorganshire Canal, 39, 63-4, 248  
 Glasgow, 195  
 Glasgow University, 267-8  
 Godfrey, Dan (and his band), 223-4  
 "God Save The King", 196  
 Gosport, 120  
 Gould, Gerald, 297  
*Graf Zeppelin*, 246  
 Grand Duke Constantine of Russia, 248  
 Gray, Milner, 252-3  
 Guards' Depot, Chelsea, 177  
 Guards, regiment of, 146, 157  
 Guest, Lady Charlotte, 10, 12  
 Guest, Sir Josiah John, 10-11  
 Guests, the family of, 14, 77, 126  
 Gunter, Charles, C.C., 218-19
- Haggard, Capt., 142, 145  
 Halliday, Thomas (Trade Union leader), 14-15  
 Hamilton, Lady, 26, 248  
*Hamlet*, 93  
 Hardie, Keir, 86-8, 94, 121, 173, 175, 199, 209  
 Hardwicke, Sir Cedric, 273  
 Hartshorn, Vernon, M.P., 204-5, 208, 210, 212, 218, 261  
 Havre, 142  
 Hazebrouk, 148  
 "Heartbreak House", 273  
 Henderson, Arthur (Senr.), M.P., 226  
*Herald of Wales* (weekly newspaper), 285-6
- Hicks, George, M.P., 222  
 Hodges, Frank, 206, 208, 210, 220  
 Holtby, Winifred, 283-4  
 Homfray, Samuel, 11, 61, 77  
 Horne, Sir Robert, 268  
 Horrabin, J. F., 222  
 Hough, Edward, 223  
 House of Commons, 87, 204  
 Howard, Peter, 258  
 Hudson, Eleanor (Welsh soprano), 93  
 Hudson, Eli (famous flautist), 93  
 "Hymn of Praise", 122
- I.L.P., 126-7, 175, 190-1  
 India, 114, 116-17, 120-1, 124-5  
 Inkipin, Albert, 195  
 International Labour Office Conference, 1930, 242-7  
 Irish Drama, 225  
 Iron Bridge (Merthyr), 49  
 Iron Kings, 22
- Jackson, T. A., 200  
 James, Dr., 95  
 Jenkins, Sam, 240  
 Jerry Straws, 176  
 Joad, Cyril, 258, 263-4  
 Jo'burg, 101, 105  
 Jones, Jack, M.P., 222, 237  
 Jones, Major, M.F.H., 21
- Kaffirs, 105-6, 107, 112-13  
 Karachi, 116  
 Kenworthy, Commander, 226  
 King Edward the First, 48  
 King George the Fifth, 236  
 Kingsway Hall, 233-4  
 Kipling, Rudyard, 93  
 Kruger, Paul, 113
- "Land of My Fathers" (a stage-play), 308  
 Langemarck, 148  
 Las Palmas, 99  
 Lawson, Jack, M.P., 210  
 Lawson, John (an actor), 36, 46  
 Lawson, Wilfred (an actor), 273  
 Leckie, John Villiers, 194  
 Leinster Regiment, 113  
 Lenin, 194  
 "Lessons of 1926, The", 225  
 Lewis, David Rhys, 55

Lewis, Ted (Kid), 268-70  
 Linton, Arthur (champion cyclist), 122  
 Lions, African, 108  
 London, 122, 175, 178, 233, 236, 248  
 "Mabon's Monday", 67  
 Macdona Players, 213-15  
 MacDonald, J. Ramsay, M.P., 208-10, 223, 230  
 McGurk, Mr., M.P., 223  
 Mackenzie, Compton, 268  
 MacManus, Arthur, 193-5, 202  
 Mafeking, 104  
 "Mafficking", 93  
 "Maid of Cefn Ydfa, The", 50  
 Manchester, 192-3, 196  
*Manchester Guardian*, 217  
 Mann, Tom, 202, 252, 286  
 "Maritana" (the opera), 128  
*Marius the Epicurean*, 212  
 Market Bosworth By-Election, 226  
 Market-House (Merthyr Tydfil), 48  
 Maxton, James, 226  
 Mayor's Reception (at Bourne-  
 mouth to T.U.C. delegates), 223  
 Means Test (on-and-off from), 276-99  
 Medals, 182  
 Medical Aid Society, 211  
 Mellor, William, 193-5, 222  
 Memorial (Boer War), 122  
*Merthyr Express* (weekly newspaper), 295  
 Merthyr Tydfil, 10-97, 120-34, 138, 156, 178, 179-82  
 Merthyr Vale, 120  
 "Messiah", 122  
*Methodist Recorder*, 295  
 Mexico, 125  
 Michael, Jimmy (champion cyclist), 122  
 Mining, 126  
 "Miss Hook of Holland" (musical play), 129  
 Monmouthshire, 53, 83, 137  
 Monmouth Town, 119  
 Mont Blanc, 246-7  
 Morgan, Pritchard, M.P., 28, 249  
 Morgan, Washington, 96

Morlais Brook, 10-11, 16-17, 41, 53, 55-6, 115  
 Morlais Castle, 48, 53  
 "Morlais Castle Daydream" (75-minute radio feature), 307  
 Morland, Colonel (our C.O.), 143  
 Morrell, Enoch (first Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil), 121  
 Moscow, 194, 207  
 Moscow Art Theatre, 233  
 Mosley, Lady Cynthia, 226, 253, 257-9, 264, 267  
 Mosley, Sir Oswald, 226, 253, 256-9, 263-5, 267-70, 287-8  
 Muir, Ramsay, 233  
 Mulligan, Dr., 167  
 Murphy, 194, 202, 229  
 Murray, Basil, 233  
 Murray, Professor Gilbert, 268  
 Myriorama, 100  
 National Liberal Federation, 242, 244, 247  
 Nelson, Lord, 26, 248  
 Newbold, J. T. Walton, 193-4, 201  
 Newmarket, 177  
 New Party, 253-70  
 Newport, Mon., 186  
*News Chronicle*, 300-1  
 Nichol, Lieut., 148, 150  
 Nicholson, Harold, 264-5, 267, 270  
 Nonconformity, 61  
 North-West Frontier (of India), 117  
 O'Casey, Sean, 225, 283, 285  
 Older Universities Scholarship, 297  
 Opera, 61, 89, 180-1  
 Owen, Goronwy (the Welsh poet), 238  
 Owen Glyndwr, 48  
 Oxford, 236-8  
 Oxford Cambria Society, 237  
 Oxford Union Debate, 237  
 Oxford University Liberal Club, 236-7  
 Pack, Capt., 149  
 Palme Dutt, R., 202  
 Palmer, Capt., 177  
 Pankhurst, Mrs., 174  
 Paris, 163-4  
 Parkhurst, Isle of Wight, 180  
 Paul, Willie, 195

- Penderyn, Dic, 26, 39  
 Penydarren Park, 61, 67, 78, 81  
 Penydarren Works, 30, 53, 95  
 Philip, Son & Nephew's (Bookshop),  
     273  
 Phillips, Hubert, 233  
 Plaza Cinema (Swansea), 285-7,  
     289  
 Plymouth, 98-9, 120  
 Pollitt, Harry, 201-2, 252-3, 286-7  
 Pontmorlais Chapel, 26, 39  
 Pontnewynydd, 156  
 Pontypool, 138, 140, 154, 156, 172,  
     186  
 Pratt, Sir John, 254, 267  
 Prayer, 197  
 Pretoria, 99, 101, 103, 111  
 Prince of Wales, 63  
 Pugh, Sir Arthur, 222-3  
  
 Quartermaine, Leon, 273  
 Queen Elizabeth's coinage, 48  
 Quetta, 116-17  
  
 "Raffles" (a stage-play), 121  
 Rand, The, 106-7  
 Red International of Labour Unions,  
     207, 222  
 Rees, Capt., 144, 151  
 Relief on Loan, 218-19, 229  
 Retreat from Mons, 144  
 Rhondda, Lady, 266, 272, 283, 285  
 Rhondda, Lord, 46  
*Rhondda Roundabout* (a novel), 280-3,  
     286, 290, 293, 300, 305  
 Rialto Cinema (Swansea), 285  
 Richard, Henry, M.P., 15, 27, 173,  
     249, 282  
 Richards, Thomas, 244-5  
 Riots (Merthyr Tydfil, 1800 and  
     1831), 26  
 Roberts, Evan (Welsh Revivalist),  
     122  
 Roberts, F. O., 226  
 Roberts, R. Ellis, 283  
 Royal Society of Arts, 220  
 Royal Welsh Fusileers, 116  
 Royden, Dr. Maude, 212  
 Russian Ballet, 236  
 Russia's aid to British Miners during  
     stoppage of 1926, 224  
  
 St. David's Day Sports, 114  
  
 St. David's School, 38-9  
 St. Mary's Hospital (Paddington),  
     176, 178, 181  
 Saklatvala, 202  
 Saline (medicinal water), 127  
 Samuel Commission, 220, 238  
 Samuel Memorandum, 218  
 Samuel, Sir Herbert, 218, 238  
 Sankey Commission's Report, 189,  
     227  
 Selfridge's (London), 235  
 Seminary, 152, 161  
 Sequah (dentist who travelled with  
     brass band), 77  
 Shakespeare, 61, 89, 212-13  
 Shakespearian Festival, 213, 217,  
     225  
 Shaw, G. Bernard, 226, 283-5  
 Shaw, Mrs. Bernard, 284-5  
 Shaw's "Saint Joan", 225  
 Shinwell, E., M.P., 232, 242-4  
 Shrewsbury, 169  
 Siege of Troy, 104  
 Simon Commission (on India), 261  
 Sind (a desert), 116  
 Smith, Herbert, 222  
 Smithson, Florence (musical comedy  
     star), 122, 306-7  
 Smithson, Will, 77  
 Socialists, 77-8  
 South Africa, 94, 97  
 Southampton, 99, 156  
 South Wales Borderers, 116, 144  
*South Wales Daily News*, 227-8  
 South Wales Miners' Federation,  
     204  
 South Wales Strike (miners') of  
     1898, 80-1, 183  
 Souvenirs, 144  
 Stalin, 287  
 Stanton, C. B., 81  
 Steele, James, 255, 263-4, 267-9  
 Stephens, Thomas, 40  
 Stewart, Robert, 201-2  
 Strachey, John, 220, 253, 256-7,  
     263-4  
 Strachey, Mrs. John, 257, 264  
 Sunday-School, 44  
  
 Taff, River, 10, 12, 18-19, 39, 48  
 Taff Vale Railway, 64-5  
 Taffy the Tenth (a regimental goat),  
     117-18



- Tai-Harry-Blawd, 17-20, 22-9, 39,  
41-2, 44, 49, 56, 170
- Tanner, J., 194, 222
- Theatre (Lawson's), 41-3, 51, 56
- Theatre Royal (Merthyr Tydfil),  
57-8, 61, 76, 81, 85, 88-9, 123
- Theatre (Sinclair's), 30-1, 35, 51
- The Era*, 297
- The Independent*, 277, 279-80, 283
- "The Internationale", 196
- The Listener*, 237
- The Observer*, 297
- "The Red Flag", 196, 230
- The Tatler*, 232
- The Worker*, 225
- Thomas, D. A., M.P., 46, 88, 283
- Thomas, Dan, 75
- Thomas, J. H., 221, 226
- Thomas, M. Albert, 242, 246
- Thomas, Rev. John, 85, 112
- Thomas, Tom, Welsh champion  
middle-weight boxer, 123
- Tillett, Ben, 169, 222-3
- Time and Tide*, 266, 271-2, 282
- Tomsky, 222
- Trade Union Congress (of 1926),  
219-24
- Tramroad, 29, 38, 50
- Trevethick (inventor of steam-  
engine at Merthyr), 26, 53
- Trianon Palace Hotel, 162
- Tribesmen (savage on North-West  
Frontier of India), 118-19
- Triple Alliance, 189
- Troops (of the Allies, 1914-18),  
146-7
- Vaughan, Joseph, 201
- Versailles, 152, 163
- Vezin, Hermann (a very good actor  
he was), 56
- Wales, 121
- Wallhead, Richard, M.P., 199, 208,  
282
- Walsh, Stephen, M.P., 210
- War (1914-18), 140-83, 248
- Ward, Dr., 32-3, 36
- Ward, Gretton, 238
- Watts-Morgan, David, M.P., 209
- Watts-Morgan, Mrs., 209
- Waun Fair, 48-9
- Webster, Dr., 32, 95
- Welsh, Freddie, a boxer, 123
- Welsh Regiment, 97
- Welsh Revival (1904-5), 121-2
- Welsh University, 268
- Western Mail* (Welsh daily news-  
paper), 296
- West Lothian, 232
- Weston-super-Mare, 186-7
- What Price Glory?*, 183
- Wilde, Jimmy ("the mighty  
atom"), 232
- Wilde, Oscar, 61, 89
- Wilkinson, Ellen, M.P., 195, 222,  
283, 285
- Wilson, J., 202
- Wolfe, Humbert, 242-3
- Workmen's Hall, 212-16
- Wormwood Scrubs, 175
- Y.M.C.A., 273-4
- Young, Allan, 253, 256, 264
- Young, Ernest, 231
- Ypres, 152, 159, 161
- Zoar Chapel, 39, 85, 112
- Zulu War, 9-10, 56, 248







